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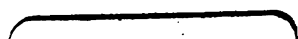
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CHRISTIANITY:

STATED IN  
A POPULAR AND PRACTICAL MANNER,  
IN  
A COURSE OF LECTURES, DELIVERED IN THE PARISH CHURCH  
OF ST. MARY, ISLINGTON.

IN THE YEARS 1827, 8, 9, AND 30.

BY  
DANIEL WILSON, D.D., VICAR,  
NOW BISHOP OF CALCUTTA.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

CONTAINING THE LECTURES  
ON THE AUTHENTICITY, CREDIBILITY, DIVINE  
AUTHORITY, AND INSPIRATION OF THE  
HOLY SCRIPTURES.

SECOND EDITION.

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THE RIGHT HONORABLE AND RIGHT REVEREND

CHARLES JAMES,

LORD BISHOP OF LONDON,

*The following Lectures,*

ARE,

WITH THE WARMEST SENTIMENTS OF ESTEEM AND GRATITUDE,

DEDICATED BY

THE AUTHOR.





## PREFACE.

---

THE design of the following pages is to unite the internal with the external evidences of Christianity, and present them in a popular form. They are intended for the benefit of those numerous individuals, or rather classes of persons—especially amongst the young—whom it is most essential to imbue, in a day like the present, with such an impression of the truth and obligation of Christianity, as may shield them from the bold, but insidious statements, which go to shake the very foundations of all moral principle in man.

The able and elaborate productions on the Evidences, with which our literature abounds, are not always best calculated for the unestablished Christian. The measured language, and speculative tone of discussion, prevalent in such works, are not the most favourable means of producing an effect upon the heart.



An uninformed Christian rather requires a statement of the direct moral and spiritual benefits of Christianity, and practical appeals to the conscience and feelings. His professed principles should be taken for granted, and the historical evidences considered only as the introduction to the claims of Christianity upon his obedience, as a moral and responsible creature.

The real character of the gospel; its remedy for the wants and misery of man; its revelation of a stupendous scheme of redemption by the Son and Spirit of God, ought not to be concealed in such addresses. It is the author's firm opinion that some injury has been unconsciously done to the cause of Christianity, amongst the class of persons to whom he is referring, by complimenting away the peculiarities of revelation; by debating the evidences as a merely intellectual question; by treating as a slight matter the evil of unbelief; and by keeping out of sight the main blessings of redemption, and the temper of mind in which these should be enquired into and received. The author thinks, that infidelity will never be effectually checked amongst us, and pure Christianity revived, till the infinite importance of practical religion pervades more apparently the whole manner in

which we endeavour to establish our people in the evidences of the gospel.

His object accordingly has been to lead the sincere enquirer, step by step, through the chief arguments which establish the truth and importance of Christianity. He begins with the admissions of natural religion. He then proceeds to point out how men act in common life on all similar occasions. He next shows the real force of the accumulated evidences in favour of the Christian faith; and presses home upon the heart the immense obligation of practically obeying truth so far as it is known.

The immediate occasion of preparing this course of Lectures, was the confirmation, by the Bishop of London, of a large number of young persons in the author's parish of Islington. These it became his most pleasing duty to instruct and further establish in their Christian profession. To assist him in this, he could find no work exactly of the kind he desired. He wanted a full and popular review of the whole argument. The excellent summary of Bishop Porteus was too brief and too much in the form of an essay for his purpose. He was induced therefore to venture on the hazardous measure of preparing the present work. The approba-



tion with which the design was received by his hearers of every class and age, and the circumstance that the bulk of his parishioners were unable to be present when they were preached, led him to consent to their publication. The Lectures are, indeed, necessarily better adapted for the closet than the pulpit.

It should be mentioned that, in the winter of 1819, the author composed and delivered a course of Lectures similar to the present, when he was minister of a parochial chapel in one of the most crowded parts of the metropolis.\* This was on a more limited scale. The plan upon which he proceeded was, however, nearly the same; and he was then so earnestly importuned to commit them to the press, that he had made a considerable preparation for doing so, when a state of ill health supervened, which entirely broke up his plan. His papers, however, have very materially assisted him in the present publication. In one respect only an inconvenience has arisen, which he knows not how to remedy, except by the present acknowledgment. His collections being written out in short hand, and often without references, he cannot now always recall the names of his authorities. He has done what he

\* St. John's, in the parish of St. Andrew, Holborn.

could in the notes to refer to the chief of them. He need not say, that the Boyle Lectures, Grotius, Huet, Kortholt, Lardner, Stosch, Paley, Michaelis, Less, Warburton, Sherlock, Hurd, Jenkin, Leland, Butler, Porteus, Beattie, Horsley, Van-Mildert, Marsh, Routh, Moncrief, Chalmers, Gregory, have been amongst his principal resources in the first division of the work. To these authors it would be most unjust not to add the name of T. Hartwell Horne, who has not only analysed, with extraordinary diligence, all the principal writers on the Evidences of Christianity, but has supplied the defects of many of them, by enforcing those moral and religious considerations arising from the intrinsic excellency of Christianity, and the responsibility of man, which, in the author's judgment, are so unspeakably important.

He needs scarcely mention other well-known productions, which he has consulted on the subjects particularly connected with the internal Evidences. Baxter, Bennet, Dewar, Doddridge, Dwight, Jonathan Edwards, Fuller, S. Jenyns, Bishop Law, Archbishop Newcombe, Miller, Scott, John Scott, Owen, Simpson, Skelton, Bishop J. Taylor, Wilberforce,—are names familiar to the theological student. To

those he would add, the Lord Bacon, for the extraordinary thoughts which he has borrowed from that great master of reason.

Several excellent works have been consulted by the author, which have appeared since his abstracts made in 1819; as the able Treatises of Bishop Sumner, Davison, Erskine, Gurney, Benson, Franks, Faber, Harness, Penrose, Blunt, Milman, Taylor, Keith, and The Monthly Lectures for 1827. If any one of these had precisely met the author's wishes for the instruction of his young parishioners, by stating, in a clear and popular manner, the whole argument for Christianity, and applying every part to the conscience, he should have abstained from the present attempt.\* But, perhaps, on no subject may a variety of publications be better excused, than on a question like Christianity, on which all our hopes depend, which is wide and extensive as the nature of man, which requires to be re-stated according to the circumstances of the passing age, and where each author, by following his own train of thought, may hope to

\* If Bishop Sumner's argument had been extended to the other branches of the subject, and been thrown into the form of Sermons, it would have wholly superseded the present attempt. The same may be said of Mr. Franks' most original and powerful work, and Mr. Gurney's.

benefit his immediate circle, and possibly contribute something to the general stores of the evidences of our faith.

The principal new Treatises which have fallen under his notice during the publication of the work, are those of the present Bishops of London and Winchester, and of one of the late lamented Bishops of Calcutta, which is full of important matter, and seems far less known than it deserves \*—and those of Messrs. Bowdler, Dr. T. Brown, Channing, Dick, Gerard, Hampden, E. G. Marsh, Taylor, Sheppard, Shuttleworth, Pye Smith, &c.

To these names he has peculiar satisfaction in adding that of an American writer of singular talent, with a good deal of the mind of our Bishop Butler, Mr. Verplanck, whose work abounds with deep and original thoughts.†

In foreign divinity, the writings of Pascal especially have supplied him with invaluable matter. Nor can he avoid mentioning the production of M. Frassynous;‡ which, abating some parts where the corruptions of his church have affected the argument, deserves to rank amongst the first works of the day.

\* Dr. James' Semi-sceptic.

† A reprint has not yet been made of this masterly work.

‡ Défense du Christianisme.



The Author has also had at hand Abaddie, Bullet, *L'avertissement du clergé françois*, 1775 \*; Bergier, *Traité de la religion*; Duvoisin, *Démonstration*; Merault, *Religion Chrétienne prouvée et défendue par les objections mêmes des Incrédules*; Les *Essais* de M. Placette, and the able preface of M. Jouffroy to his translation of Dugald Stewart's *Sketches of Moral Philosophy*.

The Author had not the leisure to read, or rather re-read, all these works, but he has consulted them from time to time. It is not from books that he has drawn his chief materials, but from the Bible itself, and from such experience and observation as he has been able to collect in the discharge of his parochial duties.

The spirit of enquiry upon all subjects now abroad, the diffusion of education, the multiplication of readers and thinkers, call on the ministers of religion to state the Christian evidences again and again. They have no reason to be ashamed of the cause in which they are engaged. On the contrary, Christianity is the glory of our rational nature. It is the foundation of moral order, the bond of civil society, the spring of all mental improvement, the best friend of indivi-

\* An incomparable little Treatise on the Internal Evidences.

duals and communities, the source of mercy, tender heartedness and beneficence amongst men. And the more fully it is known in the commanding discoveries it makes of the state of man, and the remedy of that state, in the mighty redemption of Christ, the more adequately will it appear to meet all the necessities of our fallen and disordered state—every desire of the human heart. The author is deeply impressed with the persuasion, that to eradicate infidelity, or a coldness in the Christian cause, next to infidelity, we must unite the internal with the external evidences of Christianity, and make both to bear upon the conscience of man. Thus will Almighty God be honoured in the arguments adduced for the revelation which he has given us—thus will the sacrifice of the blessed Saviour be continually adverted to as the centre truth of that revelation—thus will the sacred influences of the Holy Spirit be exhibited as the means for the moral restoration of our nature. And thus will man—feeling all his case relieved, all his wants supplied, all his apprehensions and fears calmed, all the capacities and desires of his immortal being directed to an object of corresponding magnitude and elevation—acquiesce with entire repose of mind, in the Christian

religion, as emanating from the Fountain of all goodness and holiness, and leading him to the full and exuberant fruition of all the highest ends for which he was created.

The author has only further to request of all his readers their earnest prayers on his behalf, now that he is removed from the duties of a parochial clergyman, to the fearful responsibility of that most extensive diocese, to which Almighty God in his providence has been pleased to call him.

He hopes to go forth to India in the faith of this Christianity, and to labour to promote its genuine grace and influence by every means in his power; happy if he can be permitted to dedicate the remainder of life to so high a purpose, and can advance in the slightest manner, the glory of that divine Redeemer, to whom he would desire to ascribe all the praise, for whatever strength he may receive for this or any other service.

DANIEL CALCUTTA.

*Islington, April 30, 1832.*

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cates and the holy effects which it produces, and will dwell on historical and external proofs in proportion as the period in which he lives, and the information of those whom he is anxious to persuade, may require. The *hope that is in him* will ever be the ultimate object of his reply or APOLOGY.<sup>1</sup> The outward evidences, though requiring, in some ages of the church, a long detail, will chiefly be adduced as subsidiary and introductory.

The Christians of the first century would perhaps assign the reason of their faith in such decisive and energetic terms as these :

"We entertain this blessed hope," would the Ephesian or Thessalonian converts say, "because we know that the Son of God has died for the redemption of sinful man, and has risen again from the dead and sent his apostles with the power of miraculous works, to assure us of the truth of his religion. We saw the holy apostles ; we beheld their miracles ; we have considered well the discourses of Christ, and the proofs he gave of his mission. We ourselves received, upon believing the divine record, the gifts of the Holy Ghost. Besides this, we are in some measure witnesses of the spiritual benefits of the gospel. It has "brought us from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God ;" it has revealed to us the one living and glorious Creator of the universe ; it has made known to us the fall and ruin of our nature, and a glorious method of recovery by Jesus Christ. We know, we feel that we are actually delivered from the grossest and most debasing ignorance, idolatry, vice, misery. We cannot, of course, make others understand all this inward power of Christ's religion, till they have received it themselves. But we give them all reasonable satisfaction that the religion is from God, by appealing to the un-

<sup>1</sup> \*Ετοιμοὶ δὲ εἶναι πρὸς ΑΠΟΛΟΓΙΑΝ.

doubted miracles and the other external evidences which attest the Christian doctrine. And then we show them the fruits of this divine religion in all who obey it. It makes man a "new creature in Christ Jesus;" it enables him to live a pure and holy and beneficent life; it strengthens him to rejoice in sufferings and death for Christ's sake. And our desire and wish is to bring others to a subjection of heart to this Saviour, that they may themselves be witnesses of the inward blessing which he bestows. Let them only attend seriously to the question with prayer for God's grace, and the divine doctrine will begin to work its own way in their hearts; they shall receive the same holy influences as ourselves, and be partakers of the same exalted hope of eternal glory."

This, we may imagine, would be the sort of reply of one who had known the apostles in the flesh, had witnessed their miracles, had heard their doctrines, and had thus seen with his own eyes the external evidences, which we receive now through the medium of authentic history.

In the second and third centuries, the answer would somewhat vary, as the apostles themselves were no longer in person among their converts, but had left the deposit of their doctrine in the sacred gospels and epistles. The appeal, therefore, would be to these writings for the doctrine and precepts of the religion, and to the acknowledged facts of history for its external proof; but the holy effects of it on the heart and character would still be the main argument in the breast of the Christian, and would lead him to speak the same decisive language as those in the preceding century.

"We cherish the hope of a resurrection to eternal life," would the persecuted Christian converts of the Roman empire in the third age, probably say, "because the promise of it is made to us in those books which were received by our forefathers, immediately from the hands of the apostles, and which have ever

been accounted sacred amongst us. The originals themselves are in the archives of our several churches. Copies of them are sent out every where. Some of our more aged brethren still remember the doctrine which the blessed Polycarp<sup>2</sup> taught them, having received it from the lips of the beloved disciple St. John, the survivor so long of the other apostles. The facts on which Christianity rests are admitted by our adversaries. But what is the most satisfactory evidence of our religion to ourselves, is that our God and Saviour attests the truth of it by kindling in our hearts the same love to Christ, the same joy of pardon, the same victory over the vices and idolatries of the world, the same patience under persecution, the same delight in obedience, which sealed the same doctrine in the first age. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again to a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away." Come with us and you shall partake of these blessings. Behold the effects of them visible and prominent in the holy lives and patient sufferings of Christians. We appeal to the misery and ignorance and vice which you yourselves witness around you. We invite you to receive the Christian redemption, to comply with the invitations of mercy, and to seek the aid of the Holy Spirit. What evidence can you require more? "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us, and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ."

If we go on to the ninth or tenth or twelfth century, the reason assigned would be substantially the same in the case of the sincere and devout Christian ;

<sup>2</sup> Bishop of Smyrna ; he suffered martyrdom A.D. 167 or 8.

but the external evidences would of course lean more entirely on historical testimonies. The authentic books of scripture would have to be traced back through each preceding century, to the first. This part of the statement would require to be enlarged, as the space of time stretched on and lengthened the series of testimonies. Doubts also might now be easily raised by an objector, from the mere lapse of time ; as well as from the various heresies, the corruption of manners, and the decay of vital piety, in the church. And if the Christian advocate did not himself fully understand the inward grace and power of his religion, he might be perplexed by cavils, and linger in some field of debate, perplexed in a maze of subordinate questions.

But to the holy and devoted Christian the reason would chiefly point, as it had ever done, to the hope that was implanted in him by the divine doctrine. Anselm and Bernard<sup>3</sup> would have given an answer of their faith with similar warmth, and in nearly the like terms with Ambrose and Augustine ;<sup>4</sup> as these had done in the language of Irenæus and Tertullian ;<sup>5</sup> and they again in that of the first Christians.

In the eighteenth or nineteenth century the Christian renders the reason of his faith, with no essential difference, if only that faith burn warmly in his breast ; that is, if he be really what he professes. The identity of true religion in the human heart ; the renovation of a fallen nature ; the joy of pardon ; the peace and love which flow from the influences of the Holy Spirit ; the blessed fruits of holiness in life, and the calm anticipation of the glories of heaven in death, stamp upon him the same impress of a divine religion as was recognized in the apostles' days.

But the deducing of the external evidences on

<sup>3</sup> Fathers of the 11th and 12th centuries.

<sup>4</sup> Fathers of the 4th and 5th centuries.

<sup>5</sup> Fathers of the 1st and 2nd centuries.



which all this rests, must, from the nature of the case, require more care and attention. The human understanding and conscience, indeed, to which the evidences are addressed, are the same as in the first age. The historians—Jewish, Pagan, Christian—contemporary with the apostles, and attesting the facts of our religion, lie open to every inquirer. The sufficiency also of the evidences contained in the authentic Christian writings, to produce conviction, is just the same. But it is obvious that the arrangement of testimonies, the statement of arguments, the marshalling of witnesses, the clearing of difficulties, the answering of objections, with regard to a subject which for eighteen hundred years has been exposed to the assaults and sophistries of a corrupt and fallen world, must demand habits of research, and the faculty of weighing and removing objections. Still the Christian may now, as in every preceding age, give in a few words the apology for the hope itself which he cherishes—not a reason of all the parts of a divine revelation, (which a finite mind is incapable of from the nature of the case,<sup>6</sup>) nor an answer to every cavil which ingenuity may invent, nor an account of all the historical matters connected with Christianity—but a reason of the HOPE THAT IS IN HIM, of the practical hold he has of Christianity, of the end and scope of the religion, of the authority on which it rests, of the proofs offered by our Saviour and his apostles to Jewish and Gentile inquirers, of the blessed effects it produces, and of the test to which every one may bring it by submitting to its directions and making a trial of its promises.

Different Christians will state this reason with different degrees of propriety and force; and the same Christian will take in a wider or narrower circuit of external testimonies, according to the charac-

ter of the persons whom he addresses. But the object of the humble believer will ever be to bring men to the evidences arising from the inward power and efficacy of religion in renewing the human heart, kindling the love of God, raising man from the ruins of the fall, inspiring him with the noble aim of pleasing God, and communicating to him a lively hope of everlasting life. Whether the plain, unlettered Christian can enter upon the historical proofs or not, he can study the Bible itself, can follow the divine series of evidences adduced by our Lord and his disciples, can humbly sue for the promised grace of the Holy Spirit, and thus lay hold on that substantial, moral, and spiritual benefit, which speaks by its holy effects, and which surpasses in inward force and consolation all other kinds of proof.

This has turned out to be the best defence of Christianity in every age. Like the sun in its noonday warmth, it is its own witness. The outward evidences should ever be introductory to the inward. Christianity is a principle of spiritual life—a divine armoury against our spiritual adversaries—our compass and chart during a tempestuous voyage—the bright morning star in a dark and doubtful night—the only means of reconciliation between a sinner and his offended God—the spring of holiness and peace and joy—the way and pledge and earnest of everlasting life. The best reason of this religion is the effects of it in the heart and conduct. With this, the external arguments assume their proper place as attesting a divine revelation ; without it, they are cold and defective, and void of their most salutary and efficacious fruit.

After these remarks on the answer to be given by the Christian of the reason of his hope, I need scarcely observe, that he is never to forget “that meekness and fear” with which the apostle in the text commands him to present it.

The Christian learns from every doctrine of his religion the importance of a soft and gentle spirit. He knows the corrupt tendencies of a fallen nature generally, and therefore watches against severity, harshness, petulance, airs of superiority and contempt in his tone and manner of giving a reason of his faith. He endeavours to imitate the lowliness and meekness of his Saviour. He cultivates that benevolence and unaffected humility, which become a man who has received such benefits from the hands of God, and who is most anxious to win over his opponent to a share of those blessings which Christianity proposes.

And with this meekness towards man, he will join "fear" towards that transcendently glorious Being, whose greatest gift to a fallen world he is called to defend, lest he should injure the cause of Christianity by an indiscreet defence—lest he should dishonour those incommunicable prerogatives and attributes of the great God, which ought to inspire a holy awe, when any part of his ways is to be vindicated by a creature like man, before his fellow-worms of the earth.

A reason given of our hope on the practical grounds I have before stated, and in this spirit of "meekness and fear," will neither betray the interests of religion, nor provoke the feelings of an opponent. On the contrary, if any thing can touch the conscience of an unbeliever, it is a firm but modest testimony thus borne to the evidences of religion, connected with a pure and consistent course of life. This is our best defence, as our apostle himself declares in the words which follow the text: "Having a good conscience, that whereas they speak evil of you as evil-doers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ."

It is upon these general principles that I propose

to deliver the course of Lectures on the Evidences of Christianity, of which this is the first.

I am, indeed, far, very far from thinking that it is advisable to dwell too frequently on the evidences of our religion. The business of life is carried on, not by defending principles, but by acting on them. It is our wisdom, generally, as the ministers of religion, to take for granted the preliminary questions which have so often been proved, and to employ ourselves in the unfolding of the Christian faith, and in the application of it to the heart and conscience. But I conceive that the example of our Lord and his apostles, and the necessities of the case, make it obligatory upon us, from time to time, to give some public instructions upon the grounds of our faith. The text has the force of an universal rule. It is addressed to the Christians in common who were scattered over different provinces in Asia, and it directs them to be "always ready to give an answer to every man," whether friend or foe, "who asked a reason of the hope that was in them." We are not indeed always to enter at length upon the apology for our religion; but we are "always to be ready," to be prepared with such information that we may not be taken off our guard; to have something like a facility of stating the reasons of our faith. And though this may be done briefly, where the whole subject is thoroughly understood, yet the previous information takes a wide circuit; and in a literary and inquisitive age like the present, it seems to be the duty of the minister of religion, as well as of parents and instructors of youth, to communicate the materials of such a defence, and state the chief points necessary to be attended to, and the best course of argument to be taken.

Still it is far from expedient, in the sacred temple of the Most High, and during the course of the public devotions, to enter upon the whole wide question

of the Evidences of Christianity, which has become, through the numberless topics connected with the history of Christianity, an inexhaustible subject. This is better resigned to those learned authors whose labours have enriched this department of our literature. But there is a practical and much more important, as well as more easy, view of the subject implied in the direction of the text; which, after laying the foundation of the historical evidences sufficiently to bring the religion before us as of divine origin, displays the internal excellencies of the religion itself, and thus appeals to the conscience and heart of every sincere inquirer.

It seems to me one of the most unhappy effects of a declining piety in these later ages, that the Evidences of Christianity should so often have been separated from its characteristic excellency, the revelation of a hope for lost man in the death of Jesus Christ our Lord. This is to rob the great question of its most persuasive arguments—it is to leave the question of Christianity as a dry theory and barren speculation—it is to forget all the evidences flowing from the ruin of the fall, and the blessedness of that stupendous scheme of recovery which is in Christ Jesus. It is to build a portal, whilst we demolish the very edifice into which it should conduct us!

If the question can only be replaced on the practical footing where the early centuries left it, with such addition of historical matter as the space of time demands, the Evidences of Christianity may be easily made out in a clear and satisfactory manner. Let men study it in a teachable spirit, let them trace it out in the sacred records themselves, let them see how the historical testimonies lead to the inward excellencies of the religion itself, as raising up sinful man to a hope of everlasting life by the Son and Spirit of God; let them perceive the mutual relation of the different branches of the subject, and they will

still be competent to form a sound judgment on every part, not excepting the historical.

Juries are continually determining on similar questions of fact, when submitted to their decision. The points rest ultimately on common sense. To discuss all the difficult parts of our jurisprudence is one thing; but to be able to seize a matter of fact and determine upon the credibility of testimony, is another. So in the question of the Christian religion, a plain man may be soon puzzled and bewildered with the sophistries of an adversary, and yet when the whole subject is simply and practically opened, and the leading points of the evidence placed in due order before him, he may be able to come to a safe and just conclusion.

He cannot, indeed, mistake. The goodness of God has provided him with such a mass of external testimony, and the internal evidence is throughout so level to his capacity of judgment, that he cannot fail of being able to give a sufficient "answer to every one that asketh him a reason of the hope that is in him." And it is for the sake of others, rather than for himself, that in a reading and sceptical age, it is desirable he should be furnished with the means of an argumentative defence of his faith.

Accordingly, there are many motives, partly of a general nature, and partly derived from the peculiar circumstances of our country, to engage us in the present design.

1. The young require it of our hands. We must deliver down to the next age what we received from the preceding. We must not let the inexperienced Christian go out into the world merely with the general persuasion of the truth of his religion. We must give him some furniture of knowledge in a day like the present, when irreligion stalks abroad, when the spirit of inquiry is pushed into the regions of impiety or scepticism, and the mind is exposed to the

injection of harassing doubts and suspicions. We call on the young to ratify the engagements made for them at their baptism; and it is but right that we should put them in possession of the chief reasons of the hope which is beginning to animate their breasts. They need something more than the simple word of their parents and ministers.

2. The lapse of time requires it of our hands. We are now so far removed from the age when Christianity took its rise, that the facts of it rest on a longer series of testimonies. The proof of the authenticity of the sacred books demands an arrangement of the train of witnesses. The miracles must be defended. The volume of prophecy, as it unfolds, requires more time and care. We must establish what we say of the first promulgation of the gospel by an appeal to facts. The internal character and the blessed effects of Christianity must be cleared from the calumnies and misapprehensions which have in different ages obscured them. The obstructions of a long array of errors, engendered by the corruption of man, must be swept away.

Now all this cannot be done without pains and attention. The distance of time does not, indeed, weaken the force of conviction when produced by the proper testimonies; but it does weaken the impression of the fact till the testimony is detailed: and it allows also of any thing being said. The wide space of eighteen centuries gives room for assertions and misrepresentations of every sort—absurd enough when examined—but still requiring to be examined, or outweighed by other and more practical considerations. The title-deeds of the heavenly inheritance are as authentic as in the first age, and where the hope of it is powerful on the heart and life, the process of proof is easy; but the lapse of time demands a more laborious examination, to obviate the difficulties of a scrupulous mind.

3. Then the neglect of religious education, requires this of our hands. The tendency of human nature is so strong to a secular and worldly and formal tone of religion, and the external peace which Christianity has in this country long enjoyed, favours so much the insidious evil, as almost to have extinguished amongst us that bright flame of holy faith and hope in our crucified Lord, which sustained the martyrs and confessors of the primitive church. In such a day, infidelity, the secret infidelity of the heart, always spreads; because Christianity being defended chiefly on the footing of external evidences, and the stronghold of religion, its inward grace and spirituality, being less generally understood, the rising generation are unprepared for a subtle adversary. Men hang loosely upon the Christian profession. Religious education is neglected. The precious deposit of the faith is handed down with little care. The Bible is not studied. The young are unfurnished with knowledge and unfortified with holy principles of judgment. In such a day it is essential to re-impress the minds of youth with the real importance of Christianity, its evidence, its internal excellency, its mighty benefits. In such a day it is necessary to pause in the ordinary course of pastoral instruction, and supply the omissions of education, and solemnly inculcate the paramount evidences of Christianity. In such a day it is more than ever necessary to rekindle the flame of Christian faith and hope, by awakening the consciences of men, and calling them up from a mere indifferent adhesion to the national creed, to a warm and practical perception of the blessed hope which Christianity inspires, and for the sake of which all the external evidences have been accumulated.

4. Then, in the present age, we have seen the moral desolations which a spurious philosophy has spread far and wide—we have heard the loud claims set up for the sovereignty of human reason—we have

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been astonished to see a wild and enthusiastical scheme of pretended benevolence raised on the ruins of personal virtue and domestic and civil duties. The most daring and unblushing attacks have been made upon the foundations of all religion—attacks addressed to the common people, and sapping all the first principles of social order and domestic peace. The storm has spent itself. The irruption has become its own cure. It has convinced us of the necessity of that religion which ensures peace and good-will to man. But enough mischief remains. The minister of religion must erect again the standard of the Cross, and display aloft the torch of revelation to guide a bewildered world.

5. It is partly a result of this spurious philosophy, and partly the effect of other causes, that the Christian religion has been too frequently passed by and slighted in our literature, in our projects of education, in our schemes of benevolence, in our plans for diffusing useful knowledge, even where it is far from being expressly disavowed. It has come to be a received maxim with many, that the peculiarities of the Christian faith are, as if by common consent, to be kept out of sight. Our piety rises no higher than natural religion. All beyond is bigotry and superstition. A temporizing policy like this blights with a deadly indifference all the bloom of Christianity, robs it of its peculiar glory, and reduces it to the cold detail of external morals. The channels of public information are poisoned. A pernicious neutrality prevails. Education is divorced from religion. Knowledge is accounted sufficient to restrain the passions and purify the heart. The hope of eternal life in Christ Jesus, the fall of man, the redemption of the cross, the grace of the Holy Spirit, are forgotten, evaded, opposed, maligned. Unless, therefore, heavenly wisdom “utter her voice” loudly “in the streets,” and plant the standard of Christianity, as the rallying

point of youth, "in the openings of the gates," and amidst the crowds of our population, we must expect the most daring invasions of human folly, and a still further weakening, in the next age, of the sacred bulwarks of our common faith.

6. As the unavoidable effect of all this, the minds of Christians generally, are in more danger than usual from the assault of sceptical doubts. The very excitement of the present day on subjects connected with religion, which has kept pace with the assaults of infidelity, leaves the uninformed believer more exposed to the revulsion which a state of decayed sensibility brings on. When men of warm religious affections are thrown upon their principles, if those principles are unsupported by solid grounds of reason, and some acquaintance with the evidences of Christianity, they are apt to give way for a time, and leave the mind open to the temptations of Satan, the spiritual adversary. The rock, indeed, of the Christian faith remains firm and immoveable, and the sincere believer, though shaken for a moment by the swelling surge, will regain a firm footing; yet it is important to prepare him for the storm, and assist him in making fast his position, and resisting and baffling the waves. He must be duly instructed in the foundations of his faith, and have his mind thoroughly imbued with the collective force of the Christian evidences, in order to be prepared against temptation, and preserved from the danger of apostacy.

The thoughtful Christian, however, need not fear the result of the present agitation of the public mind and the activity of unbelievers. Their spirit and morals are indications of a bad cause. The gospel of Christ has stood unmoved for eighteen centuries, and has lost none of its outward evidences, nor of its internal grace and efficacy. We need only a holy boldness to avow the hope that is in us, and give a

reason of it with discretion and meekness, in order to see greater victories achieved than have ever yet been attained. The "arm of the Lord is not shortened." Let our coldness and timidity and worldly-mindedness be renounced, and let vital Christianity be diffused, and the Christian evidences will assume their native dignity and force.

For various advantages for a defence of our faith, are afforded by the circumstances of the times.

The diffusion of education prepares for us a better informed class of hearers, gives us minds more accustomed to reflection, and capable of entering upon the consideration of a great question.

The progress also made generally in the study of the law of evidence, of the nature and bearing of testimony, of the importance of weighing numerous coincident circumstances, and observing how far they converge to a single conclusion, the habit of comparing a series of independent witnesses, and the general acknowledgment of the force of historical testimony, are all in favour of the Christian argument.

Again, the admitted necessity of following, and not prescribing to, nature; of proceeding in every investigation by slow and cautious and adequate experiments, and not by hypothesis and conjecture; of avowing and acting upon man's ignorance, except as clear phenomena lead him on—the whole system, in short, of Lord Bacon's Inductive Philosophy—prepares the mind for a similar suspension of judgment, and a similar subjection to fact and experience, on the question of Christianity.

The revival of primitive piety and zeal which has been so widely diffused in our own country, and in different parts of Christendom, is a yet more prominent vantage-ground on which we may plant our artillery against sin and unbelief. The spirit of inquiry as to real religion, the multiplied translations of the scriptures in every tongue, the propagation and

large success of the gospel in foreign missions, the reproduction of the self same holy faith and joy and obedience in the converts from Paganism now, as in the first age of Christianity, contrasted with the desolations and miseries which the progress of infidelity has uniformly produced—are all so many points in favour of such an exposition of the evidences of our faith as may prepare, by the historical testimony, for the internal evidences of the religion of Christ.

Nor can we doubt that the blessing and grace of that Saviour, who is pleased to honour the humblest means used in his service, will be afforded to us in the course of our argument, if only we enter upon it and pursue it in a spirit of meekness and candour, and with a sincere desire to know, in order that we may do, the will of God.

For I shall take for granted in my argument the Being of a God, and those other truths of natural religion which the Deist is generally so ready to grant, and which he boasts of as all-sufficient for the guidance and happiness of mankind. I assume, therefore, throughout these lectures, the existence of one supreme and infinitely glorious Being, who is to be worshipped and obeyed by man; to whom virtue is pleasing and vice hateful; and who will reward the good and punish the wicked in a future world.

How the unbeliever came by this knowledge, what use he practically makes of it, and whether after all it be indeed sufficient for man in his present state, are other questions. I give our opponent all that he asks. I meet him upon his own ground; and what I undertake to prove is, that Christianity is a revelation from God, and is of supreme obligation upon every human being.

In conducting this great argument upon these admissions of natural religion, the first question to be asked is, What is THE TEMPER OF MIND IN WHICH SUCH A SUBJECT SHOULD BE STUDIED, and do

unbelievers seem in any measure to possess that temper ?<sup>7</sup>

We may inquire in the next place, What has been **THE STATE OF MANKIND IN ALL AGES AND NATIONS WHERE CHRISTIANITY HAS BEEN UNKNOWN**, and of Christian nations, in proportion as it has been inadequately known and obeyed ?<sup>8</sup>

We shall then go on to prove **THE AUTHENTICITY AND CREDIBILITY** of the books of sacred scripture—that these books were really written and published at the time they profess to be, and contain a trustworthy narrative entitled to full credit and belief.<sup>9</sup>

Our books being found to be genuine and credible, we open them to see what they contain, and finding that our Lord and his apostles lay claim to a **DIVINE AUTHORITY**, as bringing a revelation from the great and Almighty God, we ask what credentials they produce of such a claim. This leads us to consider the undeniable and numerous **MIRACLES**<sup>10</sup> that were publicly wrought ; the astonishing series of **PROPHECIES**<sup>11</sup> that has been fulfilled, and is now fulfilling in the world ; the first miraculous **PROPAGATION**<sup>12</sup> of the gospel ; and the prodigious **EFFECTS**<sup>13</sup> it has produced, and is producing upon the welfare of mankind.

Having thus sufficiently established the divine authority of the scriptures, we must pause before we proceed to the internal evidence, in order to inquire whether these books are, properly speaking, inspired, so that every part of them was written under the superintendence of the Holy Spirit, and is an un-

<sup>7</sup> Lecture ii.

<sup>8</sup> Lecture iii.

<sup>9</sup> Lectures iv. v. & vi.

<sup>10</sup> Lecture vii.

<sup>11</sup> Lectures viii. & ix.

<sup>12</sup> Lecture x.

<sup>13</sup> Lecture xi.

erring rule of faith and practice. In other words, we must show **THE INSPIRATION OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES**.<sup>14</sup> This will conclude the first division of the whole work.

We shall come next to the evidence arising from the internal excellency and efficacy of Christianity ; those marks which it presents to every humble inquirer, arising from its own peculiar nature, as distinct from its outward evidences. Here we shall show that to the sincere and devout student who submits to the Christian doctrine on the footing of its undoubted credentials, there will arise the strongest confirmation of his faith from considering the **SUITABLENESS**<sup>15</sup> of Christianity to the obvious state and wants of man as an ignorant and sinful creature—the excellency of all its **DOCTRINES**<sup>16</sup>—the unspotted purity of its **PRECEPTS**<sup>17</sup>—the inimitable character of its **DIVINE FOUNDER**<sup>18</sup>—and its **TENDENCY**<sup>19</sup> to promote, to the highest degree, the temporal and spiritual happiness of nations and individuals.

But it may be asked, in the next place, whether there is any test to which the serious inquirer may bring the practical effects of Christianity in his own case—can he obtain a share in its blessings and make a trial of its promises? This is a practical and most important part of the whole subject. And we shall show that this may be done by **SUBMITTING TO ITS DIRECTIONS, AND MAKING THE TRIAL FOR OURSELVES**<sup>20</sup> of its proffered grace and mercy.

A consideration of the chief **OBJECTIONS**<sup>21</sup> of infidels, and a comparison of their **LIVES AND DEATHS**<sup>22</sup> with those of sincere Christians, will furnish a forcible

<sup>14</sup> Lect. xii. & xiii.<sup>15</sup> Lect. xiv.<sup>16</sup> Lect. xv.<sup>17</sup> Lect. xvi.<sup>18</sup> Lect. xvii.<sup>19</sup> Lect. xviii.<sup>20</sup> Lect. xix. & xx.<sup>21</sup> Lect. xxi.<sup>22</sup> Lect. xxii.

subsidiary argument in favour of our religion, and will turn the very weapons of our adversaries against themselves.

THE FAITH<sup>23</sup> with which the religion is to be received—the sound SYSTEM OF INTERPRETING<sup>24</sup> its records which such a faith implies—and the UNIVERSAL OBLIGATION<sup>25</sup> which lies upon every human being of obeying this divine doctrine, will close the whole work.

Need I say, then, on concluding this introductory discourse, that if any question can be important to a reasonable and accountable creature under the moral government of an Almighty and righteous Being, (for such is the admission on which we are to proceed,) it is the investigation of the subject which I have now opened.

The Christian religion proposes to needy, miserable man, a hope—a solid, substantial, abiding hope—of everlasting happiness, founded on the mysterious death of the incarnate Son of God, received by faith, implanted and nourished in the heart by the sacred aid of the Holy Ghost, and producing the most holy effects in the entire life and character. Over against this hope of endless life, the Christian religion sets the unutterably woful state of the disobedient and unbelieving, who reject its proffered grace, and persist in their rebellion against God. Its sanctions stand thus, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned.” It is to infuse into you this blessed hope, and warn you to escape the opposite gulph of misery and woe, that we enter upon the present subject.

It demands, therefore, your attention. It is most momentous in its consequences. Indifference here is

<sup>23</sup> Lect. xxiii.

<sup>24</sup> Lect. xxiv.

<sup>25</sup> Lect. xxv.

madness. The alternative of neglecting, despising, disobeying this religion, is unspeakably awful. It is not a speculation which Christianity brings you, it is not a curious inquiry, it is not an intellectual disquisition which leaves the state of men's morals and hearts and hopes where it found them. It is a question upon which an eternity of happiness or misery depends. It is a religion which inspires hope in a hopeless world, which establishes a way of pardon and peace, which reveals all the corruption of our fallen state, in order to reveal all the blessedness of the remedy for that state which is proposed to us in the Son and Spirit of God. Christianity is not a magnificent portico, with no temple; it is not a road laboriously prepared, which leads to no city: its body of evidence is a portal which opens to the temple of the living God; its solid proofs prepare a highway which leads to heaven.

The question, therefore, as to the truth of the Christian doctrine must be infinitely important. In expounding to you the evidences on which that truth rests, I should shrink from the responsibility of the task, if I were not persuaded that no exposition can be so incomplete, as to obstruct ultimately the faith of a sincere and humble inquirer—and if I did not rely for success on the blessing of that God, who has granted us the means of conviction on this subject, in an abundance correspondent to the importance of the case.

Let me further remind you, that since it is allowed by our opponents that there is a God, (for with the Atheist I am not arguing,) the duty of prayer to Him on entering upon this argument, must be of paramount obligation. Let me entreat you, then, to unite with me in supplications to the common Father of all, whom the unbeliever professes to adore and reverence as well as the Christian, and beseech him to illuminate our minds, to dissipate all prejudices and pre-



possessions, and to dispose us to receive the truth with humility and joy.

And let the pious and sincere Christian cultivate more of "the meekness and fear" which are to attend his apology for his faith. It is the holy, upright, consistent, benevolent life of the Christian which forms the best standing defence of his religion to others, and the best spring of hope in his own mind. The effects of Christianity are then prominent and decisive. Were the faith of all who call themselves Christians a really living principle, we should be able to appeal to them with more confidence, as exemplifying and embodying what we describe in our portraits of the Christian character. The inconsistent tempers and lives of the professors of Christianity are the reproach of the faithful, and the stumbling-block of the profane. For no contradiction can be so fatal in its effects on others and on ourselves, as the claim of a believer's hope and the darkness and misery of an unbeliever's life.

## LECTURE II.

### THE TEMPER OF MIND IN WHICH THE SUBJECT SHOULD BE STUDIED.

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LUKE XVIII. 17.

*Verily I say unto you, whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, shall in no wise enter therein.*

IN entering upon a course of instruction with the design of impressing upon the hearts of young persons the truth and importance of the Christian revelation, we first naturally ask, What is the temper of mind in which the subject should be studied? To this inquiry an answer may be given from the words of the text, in which our Lord declares, with that solemn asseveration which he frequently used, that "whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, shall in no wise enter therein."

SOME observations on THIS MEEK AND DOCILE DISPOSITION ;—upon THE OBVIOUS WANT OF IT in too many of those who reject Christianity ;—and upon THE CHIEF REASONS which prove its indispensable importance, will occupy the present lecture.

I. The temper of mind here inculcated by our Lord is a simplicity and teachableness resembling

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what we observe in children, who in their first infancy are free from guile, and give implicit credit to what their friends and parents teach them, without suspecting the possibility of any thing being said to the contrary. A child-like temper as to the subject of religion, is a readiness to examine the evidences of the Christian doctrine with candour, and to submit without reserve or objection to the revelation itself, upon its being found to be of divine origin. By requiring this guileless disposition, we by no means prejudge the question, much less do we demand any renunciation of the just authority and powers of human reason—Christianity is consistent with the highest reason. We ask only for such a state of mind as the glorious majesty of God and the weakness of man require; such a temper as is obviously necessary to every serious investigation, and without which, conviction upon a moral and religious subject is impossible.

The characteristics of this temper are docility, seriousness, prayer, obedience—points which natural religion professes to enjoin, and which are therefore held in common by all with whom I am now concerned, and especially by the young Christian.

By **DOCILITY** I mean an aptitude to receive instruction, a readiness to inquire after the truth of Christianity, a mind not averse from the subject, a willingness to weigh arguments with impartiality, and follow truth with boldness and singleness of heart. Such a noble temper as this appeared in the Bereans, of whom we read in the Acts of the Apostles, (and I quote this and other passages now, merely to explain my meaning,) that they “received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.”<sup>1</sup>

But to docility must be added **SERIOUSNESS**; the attention and earnestness of a mind aroused to

<sup>1</sup> Acts xvii. 11.

some sense of the importance of the inquiry, recollecting the consequences which depend on the question of the truth of Christianity, filled with reverence for the holiness of the great God whose name and glory are involved, and deeply anxious to arrive at satisfaction of mind concerning it. Christianity must not be examined as an abstract, dry, uninteresting question, a matter of mere historical dispute, a doubtful point in chronology, on the determination of which little or nothing depends; but as an inquiry which involves the honour of God, and the present and eternal happiness of man. This earnestness we find described in the scripture in such terms as these, "Teach me to do thy will, for thou art my God; thy Spirit is good, lead me into the way of uprightness. Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Sirs, what shall I do to be saved? Men and brethren, what shall we do?"<sup>2</sup>

PRAYER to Almighty God must be an attendant on this docile and serious temper. We must not enter upon the inquiry for the display of intellectual acuteness, but with the devotional frame of mind which becomes those who acknowledge the existence and perfections of God, and who profess to believe that it is the duty of a dependent creature like man, to implore his aid and blessing on every undertaking, and more especially upon an inquiry which relates to the solemn revelation of his will. Fervour, humility, the submission of prayer for divine guidance and illumination, in the lowly use of our best faculties, are essential parts of a right disposition of heart.

A PRACTICAL OBEDIENCE to the will of God, so far as it is known, is the last branch of the temper on which we would insist—that course of general conduct which may prove us to be sincere in seeking to know the will of God, that we may do it; a life and

<sup>2</sup> Ps. cxliiii. 10. Matt. vi. 33. Acts xvi. 30; ii. 37.

conduct free from those vices which natural conscience condemns ; a behaviour not inconsistent with the docility, the earnestness, the prayer for divine instruction which we profess in our inquiries—a life which shall not obviously make it our interest that Christianity should be untrue—a freedom, in short, from those primary hindrances to an impartial examination of religion, which, as films and mists, distort every object presented to the view, and make it impossible to discern the form and features of truth.

II. Now, if this be manifestly the state of mind in which the subject of the truth of Christianity should be studied, it may be useful to show **THE MANIFEST WANT OF IT** in too many of those who reject revelation. Young persons will thus be guarded, in the first instance, against the assaults of impiety, and may judge of the cause in which unbelievers are engaged, by the spirit which actuates them. For I assert boldly, that the very disposition and temper of unbelievers, give an assurance to a sincere inquirer that they were never likely to attain to truth. I assert boldly, that instead of docility, their inquiries are conducted with scorn ; instead of seriousness, with levity ; instead of a spirit of prayer, with irreligion and impiety ; instead of any obedience to the acknowledged will of God, with open immorality and vice.

Let us look at the three classes into which, in the present day, they may be divided—the Literary ; the Uninformed ; the grossly Profane—and we shall see the proof of what I state.

Let us look at the **LITERARY** and **SCIENTIFIC** unbelievers. I speak not of individuals—I speak of the body, as known by their writings publicly submitted to the view of mankind. What is the temper of mind in which they have obviously entered upon the inquiry ? Are docility, earnestness, a devotional and humble reliance upon God in prayer, and obedience to his

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at all apparent in the general tenour of their reasoning? Is this the complexion of their reasoning? They not, so far from acting in such a temper, ally disavow, ridicule, or condemn it? Mark the whole spirit and conduct. Instead of docility, see the unfairness, the inconsistency, the dissimulation with which they conceal or pervert the plainest

Instead of seriousness, notice their proud, silly, flippancy in treating the most serious of all subjects. Instead of the spirit of prayer to almighty God, observe how their arguments are directed, not against the particular proofs of Christianity, but against the production of any proofs in favour of any revelation. See them virtually denying the very being of that God, whom in theory they profess to acknowledge. Hear their blasphemies, their lies, their profaneness, which, whether Christianity be true or not, are condemned by natural religion itself. Lastly, instead of obedience to the will of God so far as it is known, notice the frightful undermining of morality in their systems, and the undermining of all the foundations of virtue, which scarcely take any pains to conceal, and which their own conduct too frequently betrays.

With such a temper apparent, I have a key to the source of their unbelief.

See one writer speaking of the life and discourses of our Saviour with the ignorance and buffoonery of a clown, and asserting that ridicule is the test of truth;—I want no one to inform me that he is an infidel.<sup>3</sup>

See another virtually denying all human testimony with one breath, and with another defending suicide and apologizing for lewdness and adultery;—I do not ask if he is dissatisfied with the Christian evidence.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Lord Shaftsbury.

<sup>4</sup> Hume.

I see a third, after composing a work full of hypocrisy and deceit on the subject of religion, publishing it to the world on the persuasion of having heard a voice from heaven.<sup>5</sup> I observe another explaining away the historical narrative of the Old Testament as a mystical representation of the signs of the zodiac.<sup>6</sup> I discover in the writings of another—and him a poet and a man of birth—that caprice and vanity, that self-conceit and misanthropy, that delight in the alliance of vice with gilded virtues, which mark an abandonment of all moral feeling.—I want no one to explain to me the sources of the unbelief of such writers.<sup>7</sup>

I turn to our modern historians, and I mark their blunders in what relates to religion, their inconsistencies, their misrepresentations, the impurities which defile their pages, their vanity and self-confidence, and the malice and spleen with which they pursue the followers of Christ.<sup>8</sup>—I ask no further questions.

I open the works of the German infidels, and find the index of their real temper in the follies and absurdities with which they are content to forsake all common sense in their comments on the sacred text, and to exhibit themselves as the gazing-stocks of Christendom.<sup>9</sup>

I cast my eye on the flippancy of the French school of irreligion, and see such entire ignorance of the simplest points of religious knowledge, such gross impurities, connected with blasphemies which I dare not repeat; I see such an obvious attempt to confound truth and falsehood on the most important of all subjects, and such a bitterness of scorn, a sort of satanic rancour, against the Christian religion and its divine Founder, as to betray most clearly the cause in which they are engaged. I take the confession of one of their number, and ask whether, in

<sup>5</sup> Lord Herbert.

<sup>6</sup> Sir W. Drummond.

<sup>7</sup> Lord Byron.

<sup>8</sup> Hume and Gibbon.

<sup>9</sup> The German Neologists.

such a temper of mind, any religious question could be soundly determined? "I have consulted our philosophers, I have perused their books, I have examined their several opinions, I have found them all proud, positive, and dogmatical, even in their pretended scepticism; knowing every thing, proving nothing, and ridiculing one another." . . . "If our philosophers were able to discover truth, which of them would interest himself about it? There is not one of them, who if he could distinguish truth from falsehood, would not prefer his own error to the truth that is discovered by another. Where is the philosopher, who for his own glory would not willingly deceive the whole human race?"<sup>10</sup>

If from the literary and scientific unbelievers, we turn to THE UNINFORMED AND NEGLIGENT CLASS OF YOUNG PERSONS, who have imbibed, or profess to have imbibed, the tenets of scepticism, what is their state of mind? I do not ask what are their arguments—those we may hereafter notice—but I ask what is their obvious temper of mind? In what sort of disposition have they approached the sacred subject? Have they ever shown any real marks of docility and candour? Have they ever taken pains, serious pains, about the question? Have they ever acquired any sound information on the subject of religion? Have they ever made themselves thoroughly acquainted with the New Testament? Do they know what the Christianity is which they oppose? Is there any thing of devotion, and a spirit of prayer to the great and glorious God, to illumine and guide their minds? What is their spirit and temper? This, this is the key. Ask their parents, their families, their neighbourhoods. The case speaks for itself. Their unbelief is not the result of honest and laborious inquiry, but the careless vanity and indif-

<sup>10</sup> Rousseau, *Emile*, liv. iv. p. 264, 5.



ference of a mind inflated and corrupted by immoral pleasure, and which has never seriously examined the subject. They have glided into infidelity by the lapse of time and the current of the passions. They are not, properly speaking, unbelievers. They do not know enough of the Bible. Their vices and pride have occasioned doubts indeed, but they dare not trust to them; their ignorance has adopted these doubts, but they do not understand them. Their vanity boasts of these doubts, but they are not able to make them a resource.<sup>11</sup>

If from this vapid class we turn to the **LOW AND PROFANE**, and what I may call, without a breach of charity, the **RUFFIAN** unbelief which is propagated among the dregs of society in the present day, shall I stop to insult the ears of a devout audience, by asking, whether the obvious temper of mind which animates them, and which, if it were to spread, would break out into open violence against the peace of society, can consist with a dispassionate and candid search after religious truth? What, when I see all the first principles of our moral nature outraged, the foundations of virtue overturned, civil order and subjection openly invaded, and adultery and assassination vindicated—what, when I see the most daring blasphemies vomited forth in the face of day, not against the God of the Bible only, but against the God of nature—did I say against the God of nature?—Alas! some of them deny the very being of a God, and have proceeded to the frightful and unparalleled impiety of exhibiting to public view a wretched, disgusting caricature.—I use the only appropriate words to describe the fact—nothing else than a wretched, disgusting caricature—with the design of ridiculing the ineffable glory and attributes of that omniscient

<sup>11</sup> See a noble Sermon of Massillon, Carême, Mardi de la quatrième semaine, Des doutes sur la Religion.

God, "before whose face the earth and the heavens flee away, and no place is found for them."<sup>12</sup>

III. The force of this preliminary argument against infidelity, drawn from the temper of mind which it manifests, will be increased, if we proceed to state **SOME REASONS WHICH EVINCE THE INDISPENSABLE IMPORTANCE** of a child-like spirit to a sound inquiry into such a subject. The facts, indeed, which I have stated, speak for themselves, but there are not wanting obvious arguments to deepen their impression upon the heart.

The first may be drawn from the influence of the passions over the determinations of the understanding. We are not merely intellectual creatures; we are led by our affections. Our judgment is swayed perpetually by what we love and desire. Pride, self-conceit, custom, ambition, vanity, envy, malice, party-spirit, vices of every kind, darken the understanding, give a bias to the judgment, and cause all the operations of the mind to decline insensibly from the path

<sup>12</sup> It will not be believed by posterity, that in the year 1827, in a public street of the metropolis of a Protestant Christian empire, a print, such as I have described, was actually exhibited. I have spoken of the writings of this class of infidels from actual knowledge. I have sent for a specimen of their books. I have looked into them. I cannot trust myself to speak of that monstrous compound of folly, absurdity, and profligacy, that disgusting mass of open irreligion—I should rather say, atheism—united with unblushing effrontery in contradicting the best-established facts, and a direct pandering to the lowest passions of the common people, which is there exhibited, and which leaves the French school of infidelity far behind it,—for it wants the talent, the wit and elegance of style, the occasional readiness to support oppressed innocence, and the illustrations and defence of discoveries in natural philosophy, which must be conceded to have belonged to some of the French infidel writers. IT IS A GLORY TO CHRISTIANITY TO BE OPPOSED BY SUCH ADVERSARIES.

of rectitude and truth. Like the jaundiced eye, or the palate infected by a fever, the understanding is incapable of discerning truth, when the affections are irritated and inflamed. We all know that even questions in the arts, in literature, in the sciences, in politics, in morals, are every day agitated with unfairness and exaggeration, when the passions of men are excited; and that afterwards they sink, by the tacit consent of all parties, into comparative neglect, when reason and truth have resumed their sway.

2. Accordingly, something of this docile temper is acknowledged by all to be essential to every important investigation; in fact, to every business of human life. Men object to our requiring this candid and tractable temper in religion; but what is there that can be studied without a similar temper? Will a father, a master, an instructor of any class, allow of levity, indifference, self-will, scorn, in his child or pupil? Can any thing be done with a perverse, unwilling student? Can any thing be taught without some correspondent attention, docility, application of mind, openness to receive conviction? Is not this the law of our nature, the condition of humanity itself? Did not even the Heathen philosophers admit this? Does not Quintilian require virtue in the orator, and Aristotle demand experience, morals, and even age in the student of ethics? And does not our great modern philosopher, Bacon, require the same in those who would pursue the study of nature? His words, in fact, are borrowed from the injunction of my text: "There is no other entrance," says Lord Bacon, "to the kingdom of man, which is founded in the sciences, than to the kingdom of heaven, in which no one can enter but in the character of a little child."<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Ut non alius fere sit aditus ad regnum hominis, quod fundatur in scientiis, quam ad regnum cælorum in quod nisi sub personâ infantis, intrare non datur.—*Nov. Org.* l. 68.

3. Now, if this is acknowledged in all cases, how much more must it be applicable to the investigation of the Christian evidences ; where the whole question is deeply moral and religious, where a revelation of the will of the Most High God is professed to be conveyed, where the soul of man, the rule of duty, the means of pardon and reconciliation, the sources of spiritual purity, are concerned—where reverence, and solemnity, and fear of mistake, and promptitude to rejoice in the will of God when known, should regulate every thought, and calm every interfering affection ?

This is the more important, because the inquirer perfectly well knows that if Christianity be once allowed to be true, a restraint must be put on all the passions, a submission of understanding and heart be unreservedly made, a rule of morals admitted to which every sin is contradictory, a silence imposed upon human pride and human reasonings before the revelation of the one eternal God, and a totally new course of life be entered upon and pursued.

Now what is the temper of mind in which the evidences of such a religion should be studied ? Must there not at least be something of docility, of seriousness, of a spirit of prayer, of a practical obedience to the rule of duty so far as it is known ; that is, something of the very temper which we are enforcing ? Can we wonder that men utterly devoid of every ingredient of this temper, should be incapable of understanding the subject, should frustrate the effect of all testimony whatever ?

4. But, further, Christianity expressly requires this child-like simplicity of mind in those who would examine her claims. I am not arguing now from the truth of our religion. I am merely stating that, as every art and science has some previous truths in common, which she first lays down—Morals her data—History her maxims—Geometry her axioms—

Physics her rules of philosophising,—so Christianity has her first principles from which she sets out, and without the admission of which no real progress can be made. Christianity inscribes on the portal of her dominions, “Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, shall in no wise enter therein.” Christianity does not profess to convince the perverse and headstrong, to bring irresistible evidences to the daring and profane, to vanquish the proud scorner, and afford evidences from which the careless and perverse cannot possibly escape. This might go to destroy man’s responsibility. All that Christianity professes, is to propose such evidences as may satisfy the meek, the tractable, the candid, the serious inquirer. The grace of God at times, indeed, overcomes others; but it is in order to bring them to this docile and humble temper, in which alone is there a recipiency, a capacity for admitting truth. As to the evidences of our religion, perhaps they are left so, says a profound observer, as that those who are desirous of evading moral obligation should not see them, whilst fair and candid persons should.<sup>14</sup>

They constitute, in fact, a moral probation, a discipline to try the spirits of men, whether they have such a docility and love of truth, as to receive a religion on satisfactory, though not, in a strict sense, irresistible evidence; and then, having obeyed the gospel, they will be in a situation to receive those higher and purer sources of conviction which spring from the abundant spiritual blessings conveyed to the heart.

It is thus the Psalmist records the divine statute: “The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way.”<sup>15</sup> It is thus the wise man divides the characters and success of students: “The scorner seeketh wisdom and findeth it not, but knowledge is easy to him that understandeth.”<sup>16</sup> It was on

<sup>14</sup> Bp. Butler.

<sup>15</sup> Psalm xxv. 9.

<sup>16</sup> Prov. xiv. 6.

this footing our Saviour proposed the proof of his divine mission : " If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God." <sup>17</sup> And in like manner the Apostles, after proving by all reasonable evidences their sacred authority, thus address the obdurate, " Beware lest that come upon you which is spoken of in the Prophets ; Behold, ye despisers, and wonder and perish, for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you." <sup>18</sup>

I am aware that it may be said, that by this course of reasoning I am undermining the very foundations of the unbeliever's fabric. I avow it ; and I appeal to the reason and conscience of men, whether that edifice can be secure, which sinks before such an assault. I appeal to the common sense of mankind, whether that system with respect to religion is likely to be true, which cannot bear the trial of calm, unbiassed, inquiry. I appeal to the honest judgment of every hearer, whether what I have been requiring is in fact any concession whatever, except upon the supposition of Deism being opposed to the meekness, seriousness of mind, spirit of prayer, and purity of morals, which it professes to cultivate ?—Did I say, professes to cultivate ? I retract that expression : for scepticism, after all its boasts of its admissions as to natural religion, knows little of meekness and lowliness of heart, proceeds on the assumption of the sufficiency of human reason, seldom even pretends to piety—and betrays by these very defects its origin and the wrong temper by which it is actuated.

In fact, Unbelief condemns herself, if she can be once calmly considered. She may make some way, if her spirit and temper be overlooked, and her objections and cavils and loud claims to a higher exer-

<sup>17</sup> John vii. 17,

<sup>18</sup> Acts xiii. 40, 41.

cise of intellect, be first listened to. But view her in the temper which she breathes, and you see at once, before you enter upon her particular arguments, the brand of error upon her forehead ; you see in the resistance to all evidence, and in the scorn and levity which mingle with her reasonings, in the impiety and even Atheism which disgrace her doctrines, and in the vice which is excused, defended, inculcated in her code of morals, the undeniable proofs and evidences of a bad cause.

And most unfavourable for the Christian argument has been the neglect of this capital point. A consideration of the spirit and temper in which unbelievers conduct their inquiry, should never have been separated from a consideration of their particular objections. We should have exhibited to the young the obvious want of a right temper of mind in those who doubt of revelation, as the key to their scepticism. We have received the statements of unbelievers with too much indulgence ; we have paid too many compliments, and made too great concessions to the adversaries of the Christian faith. We have relied too much on the irrefragable historical evidences of our religion, and have forgotten to insist on the temper of mind in which they should be studied, and without which, the strongest external evidences fail to persuade, whilst the internal are incapable of being appreciated. We have failed to urge, in the first place, and upon all persons, the docility and seriousness and practical desire to know the will of God, which alone can make any religious inquiry successful. Nor have we sufficiently held up as a just warning to mankind, the fearful obduracy and want of moral principle, which too commonly animate the opponents of revelation.

If there were, indeed, generally amongst the ranks of unbelievers a manifest spirit of piety and subjection to God, something like what natural religion professes

to enjoin—if there were a prevailing earnestness to know the will of God—if there were a pain and grief of heart under the unwilling pressure of molesting fears—if we saw these men, as Pascal remarks, “groaning sincerely under their doubts, regarding them as their greatest misfortune, sparing no pains in order to be freed from them, and making it their principal and most serious occupation to search for truth,”<sup>19</sup> then, indeed, we should feel a sincere respect and concern for them.

But their negligence and indifference, their pride and levity, their disregard of the dictates of natural conscience and of the spirit of prayer, in the very outset of their inquiries, save us the trouble of further examination, and explain to us at once the chief phenomena of their state. There seems, in the divine providence, a beacon erected on the confines of scepticism, to warn the traveller of the dangers before him. But I must conclude,

I. Are there, then, any now in this sacred temple, in danger of being shaken in their faith? Are there any who are almost bewildered at times with the sophistry of the wicked? Are there those who are cast by circumstances into the society, and exposed to the arts, of the unbelieving? Are there any whose peculiar character of mind leads them to doubt and hesitate upon every great subject, and therefore on the subject of the Christian argument, and who in the moments of temptation are harassed by suspicions and fears? Let me entreat them to follow the main principle of this discourse, and calmly ask themselves, what is the temper of mind in which unbelievers treat the most momentous subject that can be brought before a dying and accountable creature? Let them not plunge into particular disputations; let them just

<sup>19</sup> *Pensées* 2<sup>d</sup>e Partie, Art. 2.



young hearers, who, through the singular mercy of God, are uninfected with the poison of unbelief, approach ye to the considerations we shall offer on the grounds of your faith, in the spirit enjoined in the text. Enter the kingdom of heaven as little children. Examine the foundations of that religion in which you have been instructed, with the docility, the seriousness, the spirit of prayer, and the practical desire to do the will of God, which I have been enforcing. So shall every step in your progress confirm your faith and deepen your impression of the infinite importance of the Christian doctrine, as well as unfold to you its characteristic blessings. Your gratitude shall thus be increased to Almighty God for the abundant means he has given you of ascertaining what is the revelation of his will. You shall go forth into life well-grounded in your religious belief, and furnished with an actual experience of its benefits, which will set you above the reach of scepticism, and make the research of historical testimonies less necessary. And thus shall you transmit to your children the inheritance of Christianity, together with the temper in which you learned to examine and defend it.

III. Finally, let us all imbibe more of this meek and docile spirit. The same temper which prepares us at first for weighing the Christian Evidences, prepares us afterwards for receiving aright all the truths of which Christianity consists. We need, every day we live, to become as little children, to renounce pride and self-conceit, to submit to prayer, to purify our hearts from polluted affections, and to receive without gainsaying, and in singleness of mind, all the words of the Holy Scriptures, in order that we may enter more into the truth of our fallen state, into the doctrine of the redemption of man by the Son of God, and into the nature of that spiritual life

which is implanted and nourished by the Holy Ghost. Docility makes way for knowledge, promotes love, opens the road to all the beneficent pursuits of piety and obedience. It is by a child-like temper we best adorn the divine religion which we profess, and are most likely to win and gain over opponents. It is by this temper, in short, that we not only enter the kingdom of our Lord here, but are prepared and qualified to partake, through the alone merits of his death, of all its infinite blessings hereafter.

## LECTURE III.

THE INDISPENSABLE NECESSITY OF A DIVINE  
REVELATION SHOWN FROM THE STATE OF  
MAN IN ALL AGES.

## ROMANS I. 19—24.

*Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead; so that they are without excuse. Because that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools: and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, through the lust of their own hearts.*

HAVING considered in our last discourse the temper of mind in which an inquiry into the truth and importance of the Christian revelation should be pursued, I now proceed a step further. I address myself to the young Christian; and before I enter upon the

direct arguments which may strengthen his conviction of the truth of the scriptures, I beg him to pause and consider the absolute and indispensable necessity of a divine revelation, as it appears from the state of mankind in all ages and nations where Christianity has been unknown, and from the condition of Christian nations, in proportion as Christianity has been inadequately known and obeyed.

Not that man is to presume to set up himself as a judge whether the Almighty should grant him a revelation or not. God forbid! We are weak and ignorant creatures. The sovereign Lord of all (for I argue not with the atheist) has *a right* "to do what he will with his own." It might have pleased him to make a revelation of his will, without enabling us to see, in any considerable measure, the necessity of it in our present circumstances. Or it might have been only to the extent of assisting and aiding us in certain difficulties—or it might have gone to some improvement merely in our manner of worship, or some advance in our degree of knowledge. In every case, a revelation from God would have been an object of humble and obedient gratitude. But, undoubtedly, it deepens our impression of the incalculable importance of the Christian religion, when we perceive the utter hopelessness and misery of man in all ages and under all circumstances without it. The direct proofs will thus have no antecedent improbability to overcome. The religion will stand clear of any previous imputation of being unnecessary or unlikely.<sup>1</sup> It will come to us with all that strong presumption in its favour which arises from the necessities of mankind, compared with the acknowledged goodness and benevolence of God.

The necessity of a divine revelation, then, will appear, if we consider the state of the HEATHEN

<sup>1</sup> Davison.

WORLD BEFORE THE COMING OF CHRIST; the state of UNBELIEVERS AT PRESENT scattered in Christian lands; that of the PAGAN NATIONS now in different parts of the world; and THE COUNTRIES OF CHRISTENDOM themselves, in proportion as they do not obey the revelation they profess to receive.

I. Let us consider the deplorable ignorance, idolatry, and vice of the HEATHEN WORLD BEFORE THE COMING OF CHRIST.

It is most difficult so far to divest ourselves of the principles and habits of a Christian education, as to form any just conception of the state of things when the light of the gospel first arose upon the world. It is of itself no slight argument in favour of Christianity, that it has placed us on such an eminence of religious and moral feeling, that we cannot easily explore, even in imagination, that gulf of depravity where mankind previously lay. A few points of contrast is all I shall attempt.

1. The existence of one living and true God, the immortality of the soul, and a future state of rewards and punishments, are the foundations of the Christian faith, and are so generally known amongst us, that the ministers of religion can take them as admitted in their instructions. The child and the peasant understand them.

But throughout the heathen world, before the coming of Christ, the doctrine of the Being of the true God was lost. Idolatry the most debasing universally prevailed—there was no fixed belief in the creation of the world, in a divine providence, in the accountableness of man, in the immortality of the soul, and a future judgment. I say nothing about reconciliation, the means of pardon, the aids of the Holy Spirit, and other blessings of the gospel, because no notion on these important truths was entertained; the broken traditions and indistinct notices of sacrifice

could afford no light to guide man aright. And as to those primary questions which I have mentioned, and on which all religion rests—on which all obedience, all worship, all love to God, all the authority of conscience, all the sanction of duty, all the fear of future punishment, all moral responsibility depend—the utmost confusion prevailed. The greatest philosophers groped as in the night. “Darkness covered the earth, and gross darkness the people.”

2. Again, as to the standard of morals and our duties to each other, Christians have the Ten Commandments, summing them up in a brief and intelligible and authoritative code—every human creature almost knows the rule of duty. All is plain, express, binding on the conscience. But the heathen had no distinct knowledge on these subjects, no agreement on what constituted virtue, no clear idea of the supreme good, no fixed and invariable rule of right and wrong. Many virtues were unknown; many vices defended or excused. They had no sufficient motives to enforce what they did know of these things. The light of nature as to morals, was obscure, weak, uncertain, partial. Man having lost the knowledge of his Maker, had lost the rule of his law. Blot out our decalogue, our sermon on the mount; leave men to hammer out moral truths by the dim light of reason, in the midst of a thousand corrupt passions, and you have the state of the whole heathen world as to morals before the coming of Christ.

3. In a Christian country, further, we have a popular course of religious instruction from the hands of an order of persons dedicated and set apart by a peculiar education and a sacred appointment. Truth is expounded and applied—every parish has its teacher—the whole mass of mankind is educated and trained in religion. We have also the divine will committed to writing by inspired persons, and thus preserved in

its integrity from the carelessness or corrupt passion of men.

But in the heathen world, there was no religious instruction, no moral teaching, no popular doctrine, no inspired written guide. There were a few philosophers, the founders of sects and the heads of schools. But these men were themselves involved in the greatest obscurity, and not at all able to direct mankind. Few of them attempted to bring down ethics to human life and practice. They commonly engaged in endless disquisitions and disputes on the eternity of matter, the soul of the world, and other fruitless topics. They countenanced the prevailing idolatries and vices. Even Socrates, the wisest of their number, did this, and his last words were an injunction to sacrifice to one of their false gods. In their codes of morals (the Ethics of Aristotle, for example, or the Offices of Cicero) there are some beautiful theories indeed, but they are not recommended on the proper motives, they want divine authority, they are built on a foundation of pride and self-sufficiency.<sup>2</sup> The influence of the philosophers was little, if any, on the mass of mankind. Any education of the nation in religion and morals was unknown. The great body of them, the slaves, were entirely overlooked: the duties of private life are scarcely touched upon—it was the public character alone, the future statesman that they condescended to instruct. The whole human race, as to religion, was dispersed and scattered abroad, “a sheep having no shepherd.”

4. Once more, we are accustomed in Christian countries to reverence the public ordinances of religion. We feel instinctively that impiety and vice

<sup>2</sup> *Æquum mihi animum ipse parabo.*—HOR.

*Beatæ vitæ causa et firmamentum est, sibi fidere. Turpe est Deos fatigare. Quid votis opus est? Fac te felicem exurge et te dignum finge Deo.*—SEN. Epis. 31.

are inconsistent with the worship of the great and holy Lord God, whose infinite purity strikes even the profane mind with a degree of dread.

But the heathen were impure and abominable even in their religion. Their gods and goddesses were profligate, impure, revengeful, odious. "The very light that was in them was darkness." For what could the histories of Jupiter and Juno and Bacchus and Mercury and Venus teach, but vice and drunkenness and lewdness and theft and fraud? What were the Floralia and Bacchanalia and Saturnalia? "It is a shame," observes the great apostle, "even to speak of those things which were done of them in secret." Christians as individuals may be wicked and unjust, and alas! often are so; but this is, NOTWITHSTANDING their religion, and in spite of it, as Bishop Warburton has finely remarked, and therefore cases of the grossest iniquity are rare; but the heathen were impure and abominable IN CONSEQUENCE of their religion and because of it; and therefore a depravity of which we have scarcely a conception prevailed, and cases of virtue and comparative purity were rare and uncommon.

5. This universal corruption, accordingly, is the strong point of contrast resulting from the preceding observations. In Christian countries corruption exists in those who neglect revelation; but it is not of that debasing and dark character, nor to that deplorable extent which was the case before the coming of Christ. Religious knowledge, religious feelings, moral order, Christian virtue and piety, social peace, mutual charity, as we shall hereafter have to show, abound. The grosser vices are discountenanced, and some of them not even named, amongst us.

But in the heathen world, the depravity both as to knowledge and practice was deep and universal. Whether you consider the barbarous nations, or those which were most polished, whether you look back to



the earliest times of which we have any authentic history, or those nearer the birth of our Lord, all was one thick impenetrable mass of moral disorder and ruin. The most abject and disgusting idolatry, the worship of beasts and birds, of stocks and stones, the deification of kings and warriors, of human virtues and vices, of insects and creeping things, and even of that most disgusting of all reptiles, the serpent, prevailed. Practices the most flagitious were interwoven with the histories and ceremonies of these wretched deities. From this source, aided by the corrupt heart of man, flowed out a torrent of vices and abominations in public and private life. Fraud, theft, rapine, fell revenge, suicide, fornication, adultery, systematic abortions, murder of infants, unnatural crimes, the atrocious cruelties of war, the slavery and oppression of captives, gladiatorial shows, not only abounded, but were patronized, countenanced by the great body of men—connived at, if not practised, by statesmen and philosophers—publicly reprobated by none.

In fact, the language of the apostle in the text is attested by all kinds of evidence—their knowledge of God in the works of creation was corrupted—their “imagination was vain”—their “foolish heart darkened”—the whole body of learned men were “become fools,” even when “professing themselves to be wise”—the “glory of the uncorruptible God was changed into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.” In consequence, as the apostle proceeds to state, “as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient, being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil

things, disobedient to parents. Without understanding, covenant-breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful."

6. Add to this melancholy, but too faithful picture, that there was no hope of recovery from this state by any means then existing—there was no principle of reformation, no spring of revival from decay. Now, in Christian countries there is a standard of doctrine in our sacred books, where truth remains fresh and vigorous, and ready to be applied to the restoration of piety and virtue, if for a time they have declined—and accordingly reformations of pure religion from time to time take place, and the knowledge and love of the true God, and the purity of his worship, and obedience to his laws, are re-established.

But in the heathen world there was nothing to bring man back to God—no standard of truth—no written revelation—no code of morals—no order of men to instruct the people—no pure religious worship—nothing but the corrupt remains of natural light, with broken and disjointed traditions, and the defective institutions of civil society. These, indeed, just kept men together, and, aided by the enfeebled law of conscience, restrained some of the violence of human injuries—"and left man without excuse before God," as the apostle argues—but were utterly insufficient to restore a lost world, to check the current of corruption, to open the path of truth, and make known a way of pardon and holiness.

This state of mankind has been going on for three thousand years. The light even in the sacred, but narrow and almost unknown, land of Judæa had become nearly extinct by prevalent vices, divisions, and notions of a temporal Messiah—so that the condition of the world may be pronounced to have been inveterate and incurable, just before the coming of our Lord. The disease had proved itself to be more and more hopeless as time rolled by—the institutions of

society were become more corrupt—the standard of morals sunk lower and lower—the excesses of lewdness and cruelty in religious rites were more frightful; whilst, as if to mark the dire necessities of man, demoniacal possessions prodigiously infected the land of Judæa. The moral misery, in short, had reached its deepest point of depression, had intercepted, like a vast portentous cloud, the last scattered rays of truth, and overshadowed with its thickening gloom the prospects of a lost world; exactly when the Christian revelation, as the morning sun, arose to dissipate the darkness and reveal the day.

I ask, then, of any serious inquirer, (and I am concerned with none other,) whether the absolute necessity of a divine revelation be not shown beyond all contradiction? And I assure him that the picture I have drawn is utterly incapable of giving a just conception of the actual ignorance, idolatry, and depravity of the heathen world. The fact is, there never was a case so clearly made out. It is too late in the day of trial for the infidel of the nineteenth century to avail himself of the light of revelation blazing for so many ages, and then to turn about and say, “We can guide ourselves by our own reason, without the aid of Christian truth.” But this brings us to consider,

II. **THE UNBELIEVERS NOW SCATTERED OVER CHRISTIAN COUNTRIES.** And here we ask, Whence did they derive their light? Is it sufficient to direct man? Has it any force when disjoined from revelation?

They tell us, indeed, that they allow the being and attributes of God; that this one God is to be worshipped; that piety and virtue are the principal parts of his worship; that God will pardon our sins upon repentance; that there are rewards for the good, and punishments for the bad, in a future state. They con-

sider all these truths as absolutely necessary—that is, some amongst them do, for the number is perhaps but small. They call these truths common notices, perfectly clear, so that a man cannot be a rational creature if he deny them.

But whence did these truths break in upon men in the sixteenth or seventeenth century,<sup>4</sup> except from the habitual exhibition of them by the Christian revelation, and by the Christian revelation exclusively—all the wisest heathen philosophers having failed to discover one of these truths during the lapse of ages? How came it to pass that Socrates and Plato and Aristotle wandered in total darkness about every one of them? How came it to pass that these principles were first taught by persons who were educated in the Christian religion, who had received these truths in the greatest purity, from the lips of the Christian minister, and who had been trained up in all the habits and usages of a Christian community? Had these doctrines been wrought out by the study of some heathen philosopher of Northern Europe or distant Asia, some recluse in the deserts of Africa or the back settlements of the Western Continent, who had never heard of the Christian faith, an argument might be drawn from the fact; but the claims of men living under the meridian sun of Christianity, and of reformed Christianity, (for it was not till after the Reformation that Deists were known,) can never for a moment be admitted. As well might a foreigner residing amongst the inventions of the arts in England, seize on our brightest discoveries and claim them as his own. The fact is perfectly intelligible; the notions of modern unbelievers are no more than the twilight of revelation, after the sun of it was set, in

<sup>4</sup> Lord Herbert of Cherbury, the earliest of our English Deists, wrote in 1624. The name of Deist was unknown till about the year 1565.—*Leland's Deistical Writers*, vol. 1, p. 2, 3.

their apostacy from God. Christianity has shamed away the grosser errors and vices of heathenism, and the unbeliever borrows now some of the revealed doctrines, in order to gain an audience amongst mankind. There is no proof that any one individual in any age or nation ever discovered any one of these principles, except as enlightened by the religion of the Bible.

But let us ask further, whether, after all, these principles lessen the necessity of a divine revelation? Now it is quite obvious that discoveries made in the seventeenth century can be no reason against the necessity of the Christian faith in the first. But, waving this, let us just ask whether these five common principles and notices are indeed held firmly and unequivocally by modern unbelievers? The fact is, the moment you begin to inquire of them, inconsistency, disagreement, mutual recrimination fill your ears. There is not one of these principles, (except perhaps that of the being of a God,) which is uniformly admitted, much less taught by infidel writers. Each has his own vague, defective, private, unauthorized system. Then, as to their views of the true nature of piety and virtue, the qualities of repentance, the rule of future rewards and punishments, all is uncertainty, doubt and contradiction. And what standard have they to appeal to upon disputed questions, what authority and sanction for the promulgation of their tenets, what ground to stand upon, when exposed to temptation and the suggestions of passion? Though these five principles are admitted in general terms as the dictates of natural religion by some few unbelievers, yet what influence have unauthorized principles upon men's practice, how can they inculcate them, what sincerity do they show in their belief of them? Is it not notorious that infidels never enforce these truths at all, except as matters of display in argument, never employ them practically and efficiently for the regulation of their own conduct? Is it not notorious, that

they commonly look upon religion as a mere political invention, with no real claim to acceptance on its own account? Is it not notorious, that many of them lean toward ancient paganism, are loud in their commendations of its "elegant divinities,"<sup>s</sup> to use their own phrase, and continually excuse and palliate its enormities? In fact, the love of fame, a civil conformity to established usages without regard to conscience, and the pursuit of sensual pleasures, are too evidently the principles of infidels, and demonstrate that they would soon relapse into some system of gross superstition, or into atheism itself, if the presence and the restraints of Christianity were withdrawn.

But further, these common notices lose all their force when disjoined from the native stock of the Christian faith. The acknowledgment of one God, of the obligations of piety and virtue, of the duty of repentance and the retribution of a future state, are all most important truths as connected with the other peculiar doctrines of Christianity; but without these peculiar doctrines, of what practical avail are they? Where are the certain proofs of the immortality of the soul? Where the terms of pardon? Where the relief for the alarmed conscience? Where the standard of truth and duty? Where the recovering principle to rescue from the gulf of moral ruin? Where the institutions of religion, and a provision for the instruction of mankind?

All is a blank. Natural religion, if you set it up for a moment, totters instantly to its fall. The Deists have travelled by a torch snatched from the temple of God; but its light has been insufficient whilst it lasted, and has gone out ere they could boast of following it. To illustrate the importance of revelation, we have only to point to the ignorance, the fluctuations, the unsanctioned and uninfluential tenets of our mo-

<sup>s</sup> Gibbon.

dern unbelievers, even when sustained and illuminated by the vicinity of the Christian doctrine. We have only to plant our foot upon this very spot, cultivated by modern scepticism, to show the hopeless sterility, the utter absence of life and fruitfulness in the principles of Deism.

III. But let us now turn our eyes for a moment to THE DIFFERENT HEATHEN COUNTRIES OF THE PRESENT DAY.

If the light of nature under any circumstances be sufficient to guide man to his duty and happiness, we shall find the proof somewhere. If the force of conscience be capable of illuminating the path of man, we shall doubtless discover its irradiations, either in the more cultivated and civilized parts of the heathen world, or in the more unrefined.

To begin with the polished and civilized regions of paganism, what, I ask, is the moral and religious state of India? Is the temple of natural religion to be found there? Does the torch of unassisted reason enlighten and sanctify her countless tribes? The dominion of Britain enables us to speak with full knowledge of the case, and we affirm that a grosser state of vice, idolatry, cruelty, and lewdness, was never seen in any of the Heathen nations before the coming of Christ. Take the testimony of the learned and accomplished Bishop Heber, who in 1826 thus wrote—"Of all the idolatries I ever read or heard of, the religion of the Hindoos really appears to me the worst, in the degrading notions which it gives of the Deity, in the endless round of its burthensome ceremonies" . . . "in the filthy acts of uncleanness and cruelty, not only permitted but enjoined, and inseparably interwoven with those ceremonies."—Let this trait be carefully noted, their religion inculcates, encourages, compels them to vice.—"In the total absence of any popular system of morals, or any single

lesson, which the people at large ever hear, to live virtuously, and do good one to another.”—Let this again be noted.. “In general all the sins which a Soodra (a person of the lowest caste) is taught to fear, are, killing a cow, offending a Brahmin, or neglecting one of the many frivolous rites by which their deities are supposed to be conciliated. Accordingly, I really never have met with a race of men whose standard of morality is so low—who feel so little apparent shame in being detected in a falsehood, or so little interest in the sufferings of a neighbour, not being of their own caste or family; whose ordinary and familiar conversation”—mark this, I entreat you—“is so licentious, or, in the wilder and more lawless districts, who shed blood with so little repugnance. The good qualities that are among them, (and thank God there is a great deal of good among them still,) are in no instance, that I am aware of, connected with or arising out of their religion; since it is in no instance to good deeds, or virtuous habits of life, that the future rewards in which they believe are promised.”

Such is the testimony of an eye-witness, with which all other travellers and writers of credit agree. So that the eloquent and nervous language of a distinguished statesman,<sup>6</sup> in alluding to this subject, is fully supported—“In India we behold all around us smeared with blood and polluted with lust and cruelty, scenes of such detestable barbarity as seem to be intended for the very purpose of displaying the triumph of infidelity over all the instincts of human nature; rendering parents destroyers of their children, and children of their parents: in short, in every way of horror that can be conceived, mocking and rioting in deadly triumph over all the tender feelings of the human heart, and all the convictions of the human understanding.”

<sup>6</sup> Mr. Wilberforce, in 1819.



If from these we turn to the uncivilized nations of Western or Southern Africa, where shall we find the pure and virtuous self-taught people, who exhibit the law of nature in any real force, and demonstrate that revelation has little to teach them? Let any candid person peruse the accounts of the native tribes of Western Africa, from the Senegal to the Congo, or of the Hottentots from the Cape to the Tropic of Capricorn, and say what it is which nature has done for them? Where are the lessons of primitive piety and virtue to be found? Are we to look for them in the frightful idolatries, the Devil's houses, the murder of children and the aged, the indiscriminate intercourse of the sexes, the horrible cannibalism, the total want of any notion of conscience, sin, holiness—of any code of morals or sanction of duty?

Or shall we betake ourselves to any other heathen nations, the Pagan tribes of the Russian empire, of the North and South Americas, of the vast tracts of China, or the numerous islands of the Pacific Ocean—where, I still ask, is the proof of the innate power of man, without the grace of revelation? Do we not see everywhere the frightful traces of depravity and misery?

Nay, do we not see, what adds force to the whole argument, an uniformity in the vices of all the heathen nations now, with those before the promulgation of Christianity, which stamps on fallen man one impress of degradation and woe! Is not the multiplication of deities in India similar to that in Rome and Greece? Are not like monstrous and impure fables attached to them? Is not the infanticide of China of a similar character with that of the world before the coming of Christ? Is there any essential difference between the detestable practices, the horrid cruelties, the impure rites of heathenism in all ages and places, from the first dispersion of mankind to the present hour? In Christian countries, indeed, "the god of this world" hides

his more hideous features, and sceptics frame ingenious theories of religion; but, in pagan lands, he displays his true character, he marks his progress with ferocity and blood, he whitens the plain of Juggernaut with the bones of pilgrims crushed under his car, or lights the lurid flame which consumes the widow on the funeral pile of her husband, or assembles his devotees around the human sacrifice; whilst his mysteries and his morals are frightful for their fierceness, and disgusting for their offences against nature. Moreover, the offering of animals in sacrifice, the voice of oracles, and the other pretended communications with the Deity, have been lost or silenced since the coming in of Christianity; and paganism now retains only the dregs of its old traditions. She exhibits no religion but that of terror, no representations of the Deity, but those of cruelty and lewdness, no hold on the original revelation to Adam, but the faintest traces of distorted fear.

If any thing can be added to this picture, it is that amongst all the heathen tribes and the individuals who in Christian lands profess sceptical principles, scarcely one is to be found who ever acts up to that light of nature, scanty as it is, which he still retains. Perhaps it may be said, that not one, by the unaided powers of the moral sense, ever fulfilled uniformly its dictates: "Therefore, they are without excuse, because when they knew God, they glorified him not as God"—faint and obscure as that knowledge was, and limited and defective as its prescriptions would necessarily be. What then is man without revelation? What can make out the absolute necessity of some authoritative guide, to lead men to the practice of pure religion and real virtue, if the above statements do not?

IV. One additional topic remains: the state of men generally in CHRISTIAN COUNTRIES IN PRO-

**PORTION AS DIVINE REVELATION IS INADEQUATELY KNOWN AND OBEYED.**

Have men in Christendom too much light? As they recede from a real obedience to revelation, is their knowledge increased, and are their morals improved? Does the state of Christian nations show that revelation was probably needless? Is it *not* quite notorious, that the standard of religious knowledge and holiness rises in exact proportion as Christianity is fully acted upon; and sinks as it is neglected or obscured? Can any thing prove more clearly the indispensable necessity of a divine revelation? Is not the proof unavoidable, prominent, demonstrative, tangible?

From the seventh to the sixteenth century, when from a gradual corruption of the Christian faith, revelation was more and more lost sight of, what was it that marked the decay? Was it not morals depraved—superstitions multiplied—heathenism revived under the garb of Christianity—spiritual tyranny established—the pure worship of God forgotten—moral duties exchanged for vows and pilgrimages and austerities—secularity—selfishness—moral apathy—vice? And what was it that recalled men to the truth and practices of essential religion at the period of the reformation? Was it unaided reason; or was it the Book of Revelation re-opened, re-published, re-appealed to by the magnanimous zeal of the Reformers and martyrs?

Take any period you please, and tell me the instance in which reason ever brought men up from the gulf of ignorance and degeneracy; show me the spot where its boasted irradiations shone forth; point out the people amongst whom conscience and the moral sense and the contemplation of the works of nature, I will not say, first planted religion, but preserved it when it had been planted, or revived it when it had declined, or purified it when it had been corrupted. It is by revelation only that truth is first sown; it is by reve-

lation only that it is nourished; it is by revelation only it is re-cultivated and made fruitful.

Cast an eye over the states of Christendom now, and tell me whether the moral and religious purity of each is not in proportion to its adequate knowledge of the Christian revelation? Is it to France during the late rule of infidelity, that I am to be directed for a proof, that revelation can be spurned by a Christian people without injury? What, have we forgotten the overwhelming corruption of all ranks of her people, not a quarter of a century since, as the infidel school succeeded in their daring designs? Have we forgotten the goddess of reason, and the abolition of the Sabbath, and death proclaimed an eternal sleep, and the reign of terror, and the murders of thousands and tens of thousands all over the finest country of Christendom, when it had renounced its religion and its God?

I will not stop to say a word on the state of Italy and Spain, where the gross ignorance of the Christianity they still profess in name, is marked with the correspondent demoralization of the people; I will come nearer home and put the question of the necessity of a revelation to the test of our own observation. Survey the state of your populous towns, and the mass of your manufacturing poor, and say, have you any sufficient hold upon the conscience, except as the Christian religion is adequately known and obeyed? What does the neglect or ignorance of the peculiar truths of the Bible produce? What do all the improvements in education, in the mechanical arts, in science, and the exercise of the reasoning powers produce, if disjoined from Christianity, and poured into the receptacle of a proud intellect? Must not every one be compelled to acknowledge that revelation is the foundation of virtue, conscience, subjection to law, and the peace of society? That it is so far from being unnecessary in its original communication, that

it is indispensable still to the maintenance and application of the truths it has discovered, and the principles it has taught?

Indeed, may I not advance a step further, and appeal to the heart of every true Christian before me? Do you find revelation unnecessary? Can you do without your Bible, without your Saviour, without the promises of grace? Do you find that if you close the sacred volume, and rely on natural light and reason and argument and the fitness of things, you increase in the love of God, and obedience to Him? Do you not, on the contrary, feel that all I have said of the absolute and indispensable necessity of divine revelation, is greatly below the real truth of the case? Do you not feel that every step safely taken, is taken with Christianity as your guide?

But why press an argument further, which defies enumeration in its details? I speak to the docile student who is truly desirous to know the will of God; and I ask him—after this review of the state of the world before the coming of Christ, of unbelievers scattered now in Christian countries, of the heathen nations around us, and of Christian people in proportion as revelation is only partially known and obeyed—whether a revelation from God was not indispensably necessary for man; necessary to teach the unity and perfections of God; necessary to teach the state of man and his obligations; necessary to teach the way of expiation and atonement for sin; necessary to teach the rule of duty, the immortality of the soul, and a future state of rewards and punishments; necessary to teach the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, as renewing and consoling the heart, and applying to it the remedy which God has provided for all the wants of a fallen world.

Having brought my young inquirer to this point, I would add two or three remarks of the greatest im-

portance. I would inform him that a general impression has actually prevailed throughout the world, that God has granted some communication of himself to man ; that supposed revelations have obtained credit solely on the ground of the great likelihood of such a blessing ; that any notion of natural religion doing all that is necessary for us, is opposed to the general sense and belief of mankind in all ages ; and that the spontaneous dictate of the weakness of man is to crave a divine direction. Surely this is a remarkable fact : but this is not all.

I would inform him further, that the wisest and greatest amongst the ancient Heathen, have confessed their despair of remedying, by any means known to us, the vices and miseries of mankind, and have desired a divine guidance ; and that Socrates, more especially, cries out as it were for help, and tells his disciples to wait patiently till some revelation should be made.<sup>7</sup>

Having called his attention to these circumstances, I would then ask him to recollect the admitted benevolence, wisdom, and goodness of the Deity ; and that he has confessedly provided remedies and palliatives for every other evil in life, except, on the idea of there being no revelation, for the greatest of all, moral depravity.

I would next beg to ask him, as man, by the admission of unbelievers themselves, may come at some future period, and in another state of being, to a more enlarged knowledge of God and of himself, by an emanation of the divine favour ; whether the obvious inference is not that the beginnings of such future communication may be looked for now in the intermediate accession of knowledge contained in a divine revelation ?<sup>8</sup>

Let the candid inquirer lay these things together,

<sup>7</sup> Plat. Dial. 2 Alcib.

<sup>8</sup> Davison,

and let him say whether it be so extremely improbable that God has granted to his fallen but accountable creatures, some kind of divine aid and guide and hope of deliverance.

For, be it well remembered, that infidelity blots out, not only the revelation properly called Christian, but the preceding revelation also to Moses and the prophets, (from which all the faint traces of truth discernible in the sacrifices, the incense, the purifications, the oracles of the heathen world, had their rise,) and leaves a total blank in the creation of God from the fall to the present hour—a blank which it pretends not to fill, except by vapid declamations on the sufficiency of reason. But there is no other revelation—no counter-system—no choice of religions proposed to man.<sup>9</sup> The question is between Christianity and nothing; between Christianity and a dark uncertain hesitation as to every point of faith and practice here, and a gloomy and impenetrable obscurity hereafter.

But no, my brethren, I cannot longer dwell on a supposition so frightful, so dishonourable to our Almighty Father and Preserver—so full of dark despair to man. No, my brethren, the God of mercy and creation has not deserted us in our fallen state: he has not left us without a guide. The unbeliever, in the scornful spirit which I described in my last discourse, may take the miserable part of exalting beyond all measure, the light of reason, and may shut his eyes to the glories of Christianity; he may attempt to rekindle his faded taper at the blazing torch of revelation, and then claim it as his own, and try to extinguish the very luminary to which he owes all his feeble irradiation. But we are not so lost to rea-

<sup>9</sup> The imposture of Mahomet proceeds on the revelation of the Bible, to which it pretends to be supplementary, and is altogether undeserving of notice in the present part of our argument.

son and conscience; we are not so lost to all feelings of gratitude to God; we are not so lost to all the dictates of experience and truth, as to follow him in his infatuated wanderings. We derive from the very necessities of man, connected as they are with the other direct testimonies which we shall soon review, an invincible argument in favour of our religion.

I. Let me then, in conclusion, urge upon all before me, the practical application of the topic which we have been thus considering. Let me remind them of that temper of teachableness and prayer in which the question is to be studied. Let me urge every one to examine, in this temper, the proofs of the necessity of revelation. Let each person ask himself what he ever knew, or what he now knows practically, of the being and perfections of God, the holy law, the atonement for sin, the means of overcoming temptation, and actually living a holy and humble life, except as revelation shines with its friendly light? I do not wait for his reply. I know that in proportion as he imbibes the right disposition of mind, he will acquire, by his own observation, an increased capacity of judging of the need there is of a divine revelation. He will confess, that, whatever others may say or think, he feels that without Christianity man can never be rescued from the gulf of sin and misery in which he is involved. His own necessities expound to the practical student the common state of mankind.

II. Then let us recollect what thankfulness we owe to God for the advantages we possess in this Christian and protestant country. What praises should we render to the Author of all goodness for casting our lot in a land of light and knowledge. After reviewing the darkness of the world, can we avoid exclaiming, "Blessed are our eyes for they see, and our ears for they hear!" If there be a humble



state of mind, can we avoid thanking God continually for having been "delivered from the kingdom of darkness," for having been blessed with the Christian revelation of light and peace?

III. Again, what unaffected compassion should this subject inspire for the heathen and Mohametan nations "that sit in darkness and the shadow of death!" If we were to consider only the temporal afflictions and calamities flowing from the want of the Christian doctrine, where is there a heart so hard that would not feel some movements of sympathy, when he beholds the souls of his fellow-men degraded—reason obscured—idolatry the most debasing triumphant—the light of truth extinguished—the dark and sensual passions enslaving the nobler powers—war raging with unmitigated fierceness—the whole female sex depressed, injured, enslaved—man, the glory of the creation, dethroned? Where is there the tender, the humane heart, that would not weep over a fallen world even in these respects, and be prepared to weigh with candour the evidences, which the goodness of God has supplied, of his revelation of "peace and goodwill to man" in Jesus Christ?

But when to these temporal miseries of the heathen world, we subjoin those which spring out of their spiritual condition; when we consider the perfections of God, his law, the accountableness of man, the immortality of the soul, and eternal judgment; and when we remember, moreover, that it is through the torpor of Christians that divine truth has not yet visited them, can we rest quiet without using all means, by the propagation of missions, and the circulation of the Holy Scriptures, to put a stop to the woe and desolation of sin? And can we forbear to feel a horror at that cold-blooded infidelity which, from pride and the love of moral darkness, denies the aid of mercy to a ruined world, saps the faith of Christians where it can, and deals in scorn and sar-

casm and objection against the healing doctrine of salvation? O, let the unbeliever remember that the guilt of rejecting revelation, is a crime from which, at least, the heathen, with all their vices, are free : for they have never contracted the peculiar guilt of spurning this immense benefit and all its accumulated proofs ; nor have they ever rendered themselves, by habits of obdurate resistance to truth, incapable of appreciating the evidence, and welcoming the message of eternal mercy.

## LECTURE IV.

## THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

## 2 THESS. III. 17.

*The salutation of Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle: so I write.*

WE proceed now to give some details of those direct Evidences of Christianity, by which its truth and infinite importance may be best imprinted on the youthful mind.

And here we, first, naturally ask, How do we know that the gospels and epistles were really composed by the apostles and disciples whose names they bear, and are deserving of credit as histories, so that a fact ought to be accounted true because it is found in them? Or, to speak the language of criticism, How do we know that the books of the New Testament are authentic and credible?

I say, of the New Testament, for none who admit the authority of that part of the Holy Scripture, can doubt the truth of the other. The two, indeed, are so indissolubly connected, that a very few observations will serve to show the authenticity and credibility of the Old Testament, when the authority of the New has been once established.

At present, I confine myself to the question of authenticity. But before I enter on it, I pause for a

moment, because it may perhaps strike a young person as a difficult thing, to show that the books of the New Testament were really written and published by their respective authors in the first century. The distance of time may seem to him so immense, as to render any satisfactory evidence hopeless. How is it possible, he may ask, to prove that writings published seventeen or eighteen centuries since are genuine? Besides, his inexperienced mind may perhaps be startled at the very proposal of bringing the sacred scriptures to a merely historical test, in common with any other ancient writings. The very sacredness of the subject, and the awe with which we have justly instructed him to regard the Bible, may lead him rather to shrink from such a proposal. He may think it more natural and satisfactory to go at once to the divine inspiration of the New Testament, without entering on the historical question of, what has been so often proved, its authenticity.

And, undoubtedly, this is the shortest, and in some respects, the easiest course. We should then only have to prove the inspiration of the scriptures from the impress of the divine hand which is upon them, from the numerous arguments employed by our Lord and his apostles in support of their mission, and from the divine effects which Christianity produces. This is what we incidentally do in almost every sermon, and in common cases it is sufficient. But such a plan will not answer my present design, which is to lead the young, step by step, over the primary grounds of their faith, and thus to bring them to a full persuasion of the nature and obligation of the Christian religion.

Nor indeed need we fear the consideration, in their proper place, of any of those previous historical evidences which the goodness of God has furnished us with, as the first stepping-stones to our faith. It is

in this way we act every day in all those grammatical, geographical, and chronological inquiries, which are connected with the just interpretation of the language of the scriptures. Considered with a humble and teachable mind, and for their proper uses, they directly subserve the most practical purposes of revelation. It is thus that the Christian church, from the very days of the apostles, as we observed in our introductory discourse, has been accustomed to act as to the external evidences. At first, indeed, the authenticity of the sacred books did not come into question. Even heathen and Jewish adversaries, during the early centuries, admitted and argued upon their authenticity. This is to us, at the distance of eighteen hundred years, a capital point—a point which places the whole Christian argument beyond dispute. Still, in each age, as it carried the church further from the origin of the religion, the authenticity required proof, and the series of testimony to this and other historical facts, demanded more care to collect and arrange. But this was always done with the utmost cheerfulness; for the purpose of passing on securely, as we design to do in the present course, to the proofs arising from the actual beneficial effects of Christianity on the hearts and lives of men.

Let us then consider how the question of the authenticity of the New Testament, difficult as it may seem at first, really stands.

The apostle Paul, in the words of my text, clearly refers to a test of authenticity, and calls on the first disciples to receive his letter on the footing of this test and none other—"The salutation of Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle, so I write." He adds a similar attestation to his Epistle to the Corinthians, "The salutation of me Paul with mine own hand." And so to that to the Colossians, "The salutation by the hand of me Paul,

Remember my bonds." Also in that to the Galatians, "Ye see how large a letter I have written to you with mine own hand."

We find also in the close of the Epistle to the Romans, the amanuensis or secretary of the apostle, distinguishing himself from the sacred author, "I Tertius, who wrote this epistle, salute you in the Lord."

The apostle also, on one occasion, expressly cautions his converts against receiving any unauthenticated writing in his name: "Now we beseech you, brethren, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, neither by spirit nor by word, nor by letter as from us."

The question of authenticity is, therefore, considered most important by the sacred writer himself, and admitted to be a separate question from the proof afforded by the divine contents of the writing, or the holy effects which it produced.

Then I conclude there must be a propriety, and even necessity, on fit occasions, of considering this first branch of the Christian argument, as well as the succeeding ones; and that till this first point is settled, nothing else can be considered in an orderly and legitimate manner.

I think we may also conclude, that if there be ordinary human means of ascertaining the authenticity of ancient writings, upon which men are constantly acting in their most important concerns, it is probable that the Almighty would leave the authenticity of the New Testament to rest upon the same grounds. For it appears a constant part of the Divine conduct not to interpose in an extraordinary way, when the ordinary course of his providence furnishes sufficient means of guidance; but rather to leave men to care and inquiry and diligence, accompanied with that humble temper of heart which will guard against pride and obstinacy, and lead them to use the divine

revelation, when ascertained, for the practical purposes of faith and obedience.

The question then of authenticity or genuineness,<sup>1</sup> now before us, is a purely historical one. I postpone for the present, credibility, divine authority, inspiration, internal excellency—these, in themselves much more important, will be considered in their place, and will derive tenfold force from this previous inquiry. All I now have to do, is to show that **THE BOOKS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT ARE AUTHENTIC**; that they were written by their professed authors, and published, as they are stated to have been, in the first century of the Christian æra.

On this question I shall offer, on the present occasion, only some **GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS**, reserving more particular proofs for the next lecture.

1. The authenticity of the books of the New Testament may be proved in the same way in which **OTHER ANCIENT WORKS ARE ASCERTAINED TO BE THE PRODUCTIONS OF THEIR RESPECTIVE AUTHORS**, and to have been published at the time when they profess to have been.

I take as an example, our venerable Book of Common Prayer. How do I know that it was compiled by the Martyrs and Confessors of the English church three hundred years since, at the period of the reformation in the sixteenth century? I answer, because we received it, without contradiction, from our immediate forefathers as the works of these writers, and they from their ancestors, till we come up to the date of publication. I answer, because it was a matter of

<sup>1</sup> I use the words authenticity and genuineness (after Bishop Marsh and most foreign divines) for the truth of authorship; and I use credibility, for the trust which may be reposed in the matters which an author relates—the trustworthiness of his book.

history at the time; because contemporary authors quote and refer to it; and because adversaries and opponents, though warmly contending against some of its doctrines or rites, never called in question its authenticity, that is, (which is all we are now considering,) its really being the production of the professed writers. Add also, that there is a succession of editions which may be traced back to the first. Thus I am as certain, for all practical purposes, of this historical fact, as if I had been contemporary with the English reformation. The general obscurity, resting on ancient works, begins, you see, to be dispelled.

I go back seven or eight hundred years from the present time, and ask, how do I know that the survey of England, called Domesday Book, was written in the reign of William the Conqueror in the eleventh century? I apply the like arguments. We received, by the same distinct transmission, the historical fact. It was a matter of record. The original manuscript is now amongst our national records, a fac-simile of which was published by order of parliament in the reign of George III.<sup>2</sup> It has been referred to by contemporary and all succeeding historians. It has been appealed to in our courts of law from the reign of the first Henry (A.D. 1100) to the present time. I am, therefore, just as certain of the authenticity of this celebrated document, as if I had lived at the period when it was first compiled. Thus the case clears up yet more. You perceive that the genuineness of works published in remote times, may be proved.

I go back six hundred years further, and ask, how do I know that the Institutes of the Emperor Justinian were published in the sixth century?<sup>3</sup> The proof is the same, only longer in the series of wit-

<sup>2</sup> In the year 1767.

<sup>3</sup> About the year 534—about 1300 years since.



nesses. I answer, because the present generation received it from the preceding, and that from the one before it, as the work of that monarch; because it has been a matter of history from his time to the present in all authentic memoirs; because it has formed ever since, and now forms, the code of civil law by which almost all European nations are governed; because it was an æra in legislation, and the distinguishing glory of the reign of Justinian. I ask no more; I could not be better satisfied if I had been a contemporary. We begin to see our way in such inquiries—the ground is firm.

I go back again five hundred years more—to the Augustan age, the period of our own sacred books, and I inquire how I know the authenticity of any of the most celebrated works of the philosophers of that time, the writings of Seneca for example, born a few years before Christ, and put to death by the command of the monster Nero about A. D. 68? I answer, on the same principle as before, because I can trace up the book from the present age, in successive reference or quotation through each preceding age to the time in which he lived—the Augustan. I turn to Tacitus, the celebrated contemporary historian, whose writings have been in every one's hand ever since, and read the account of Seneca. I turn to Quintillian, who flourished within twenty years of Seneca's death, and read a criticism on his works. From that day to the present I see those works referred to, quoted, commended, blamed, by men of different classes and different ages and different nations and different opinions; in opposition to each other in almost every respect, but agreeing as to the authenticity of these books. I have all the evidence I could desire. I am as certain of the historical fact concerning the writings of Seneca, as I should have been if I had lived at the time. Thus all the difficulty which we felt before we began the inquiry, is gone. The impossibility of proving

authenticity of ancient works was a mistake. We at the case admits of a satisfactory determination.

The lapse of years makes no difference in our opinion, so long as we can distinctly trace up, by direct and uninterrupted testimonies, the fact we are in search of.

Come now to the question of the authenticity of the books of the New Testament, and if I am asked to believe them to be the undoubted productions of the apostles and evangelists of our Lord; I answer, just on the same historical principles as in all the like cases—because I received these books, as a sacred deposit, and the undoubted writings of their respective authors, from my immediate predecessors, and they from theirs; and so each preceding generation from the one before it: till I ascend without interruption, from the present day to the very beginning of the apostles, tracing the distinct proofs and testimonies in each period. I answer, because not only I, but all Christians in all nations, of all languages and all ages, have done and do the same. I answer, because it is a matter of history, attested by contemporary authors, Jewish, Christian, profane, that these were the writings of the apostles and evangelists. I answer, because amidst the sharpest opposition of sects within the church, and of Jews and heathens without, these books were never denied to be the authentic documents of the Christian religion, but taken for granted and argued upon as such. I answer, because hundreds of ancient manuscripts now extant, some of a date within a few centuries of the birth of Christ. I answer, because institutions have been established, national usages been established, and sacred laws kept, in consequence of the belief of the truth recorded in these books, and on the footing of their belief, and no other, from the apostles' days to the present.

I am as certain, then, of the naked historical

fact of the authenticity of the New Testament, that is, that the books of it were the writings of their respective authors, as I am of that of the common Liturgy of the English Church, or of the Doomsday Book, or the Institutes of Justinian, or the works of Seneca, or any other ancient writer, of whom no serious doubt was ever entertained in the world. I appeal to historical testimony on this historical question, just as in a question of natural philosophy I should appeal to experiment; or in matters of reasoning to conclusive arguments, leading up to primary and universally admitted truths.

In fact, there are but three ways of receiving knowledge according to the subject matter of the thing inquired into. Does it relate to things material and sensible? I appeal to the report of the senses; as that the magnet attracts iron. Does it relate to intellectual things, founded on invariable relations? I arrive at it by just reasoning; as that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles. Does it relate to matters of fact, as the publication of a certain book, by a certain author, in a certain age? I appeal to testimony.

Such is my first general observation. We prove the authenticity of the New Testament by the same kind of arguments (though much stronger) as those by which men are uniformly governed in all like cases.

But it may be said, books are sometimes spurious or unauthentic; what then is the manner in which a fictitious work may be discovered? This leads me to a

II. General consideration. NOT ONE OF THE MARKS BY WHICH CRITICS ARE ACCUSTOMED TO DETECT SPURIOUS WRITINGS, APPLIES TO OUR SACRED BOOKS.

We think we have reason, says Michaelis, to hesitate about the authenticity of a work, when well-

founded doubts have been raised from its first appearance in the world, whether it proceeded from the author to whom it is ascribed. When the immediate friends of the alleged author, who were best able to decide upon the subject, denied it to be his. When a long series of years has elapsed after his death, in which the book was unknown, and in which it must have been unavoidably quoted, if it had existed. When the style is different from that of his other works, or if none remain, from what might have been reasonably expected. When events are recorded or referred to which happened later than the time of the supposed author. When opinions are advanced which are contrary to those which he is known to maintain in his other works.

Now, not one of these marks of spuriousness applies to the New Testament. From the first appearance of it in the world, no doubts were raised whether it proceeded from the apostles and evangelists.—The friends and followers of those authors, who were best able to decide upon the subject, affirm it to be theirs.—No series of years elapsed after the death of the apostles in which the books of it were unknown or were not quoted and referred to.—The style is exactly what might reasonably be expected.—The events referred to are precisely those, and none other, which occurred at the time when they were professedly written.—The opinions advanced in each book are in unison with all other writings of each author.

But this is not all. The marks of suspicion laid down by lawyers as to legal deeds, may serve to strengthen by contrast our argument for the genuineness of our sacred books. A French writer, in publishing lately the manuscript of an English author, by no means favourable to Christianity,<sup>4</sup> lays down nearly the same indications of spuriousness with those enu-

<sup>4</sup> Mr. Jeremy Bentham.

merated in the literary question by Michaelis. So that not one criterion of fiction would be proved, even in the technical proceedings of a court of judicature, on our sacred books. The same author adds, "In a question relating to the authenticity of a deed, the general presumption is in its favour: we may even say, on a consideration of the recorded cases, that false ones are of rare occurrence."<sup>5</sup>

If, therefore, the presumption is in favour of authenticity, and instances of spuriousness, even in the documents employed in legal affairs, are rare, we have the strongest reason for assuming, that in the large Book of the New Testament, consisting of many different writings, composed during a period of sixty years, and circulated throughout the world, the record is authentic. And this presumption amounts to a certainty, when upon applying all the marks for detecting false deeds, not one sign nor vestige of spuriousness appears.

In fact it may be shown, that **THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE CASE BEFORE US** make it not only improbable, but morally impossible, that our sacred books should be forgeries.

For this, you will observe, is now the alternative. There is no middle course. Either the New Testament is authentic, or it is a base imposition, a vile and wicked fabrication on the most solemn of all subjects. There could be no venial mistake, no unintentional error. There must have been the most express design to deceive mankind. Distressing to the candid and humble mind as the very hearing of such a statement must be, it is necessary to put it. Nay, the very putting of it affords no slight additional presumption in favour of the authenticity of the New Testament to those who know any thing of the sublime discoveries, the holy precepts, the divine doctrines which constitute the gospel of our Saviour and Lord. It is

<sup>5</sup> *Preuves Judiciaires*, tom. i. 308.

impossible such writings should be impudent and daring forgeries. But this touches on another topic.

The state of the question now before us is this. The sacred books are either the productions of the apostles and evangelists, or they are a direct and barefaced fabrication, composed by impostors of the apostolic or a succeeding age. Now, I affirm that it is morally impossible, from the circumstances of the case, that they could be false productions imposed upon the Christian church. For, take what age you please, and tell me when such an attempt could have been made.

Could it have been made during the lives of the apostles? What! twenty-seven books, the production of eight distinct authors, palmed upon the very converts of those authors, with whom they were in constant intercourse, during the very period of that intercourse! The supposition refutes itself.

But, could it have been in a subsequent age? Certainly not after the commencement of the third century, when the books were actually in circulation over the world, (as we shall see in the next Lecture,) were read in the churches, transmitted by versions into new languages, and preserved as the most precious deposit in the Christian archives! Could false books have been imposed, under such circumstances, upon the wakeful minds of Christians, in every part of the world; and imposed on them, not only as inspired writings, but as the works of the apostles and evangelists, which had been received by their immediate parents and forefathers, as their sacred books, and had been handed down to them from the apostles, from age to age? Incredible—absurd—morally impossible! Ten thousand voices would instantly have cried out that they had never heard of such books previous to their production by the supposed impostor.

Then the only time when a forgery of such magnitude appears even possible, is between the death of

the apostles and the period of the universal diffusion of the books. But St. John lived till quite the close of the first century—his own disciple, Polycarp,<sup>6</sup> till beyond the middle of the second—and Irenæus,<sup>7</sup> the disciple of Polycarp, to the commencement of the third; when Tertullian and a host of witnesses put the supposition of forgery quite out of the question. Can any one imagine, that during this brief period a daring falsification, such as we are considering, could have been made—a falsification which must at least have demanded a long series of ages—much obscurity—many favourable opportunities, to have been attempted even as to a single book out of the twenty-seven, in a single community, out of the thousands which overspread, according to all testimony, the Roman empire, by the beginning of the second century!

But not only so. Christianity was planted in the midst of enemies and persecutors—Christianity raised its head amidst Judaism and Heathen idolatry—Christianity was assaulted for three hundred years by a succession of violent and cruel and unjust persecutions. Christianity was never without some false disciples in its own bosom, watchful to seize every advantage. It was morally impossible to give currency to false writings in the face of an angry, a malicious, and obstinate hostility from every quarter. It was morally impossible that any fraud should have escaped, not only discovery, but that public exposure and disgraceful defeat from all parties, which attend on a detected imposition.

But, we have specimens remaining of what false, or, rather, of what unauthentic works would be, and of the treatment they would meet with. We have productions of uninspired men, forgeries in the names of the apostles and their comparions, professing to be narratives of the acts of our Lord and his disci-

<sup>6</sup> To A. D. 163.

<sup>7</sup> To A. D. 202.

plea. But what are they?—weak, puerile, impertinent, inconsistent, absurd, contradictory; with those very marks of spuriousness about them, from which our sacred writings are entirely free. And how were they received? With the scorn and neglect, when piously designed; and with the abhorrence and detestation, when of a worse character, with which such fabrications would be received now.

But more than this. Even the works of instruction composed by the apostolical fathers, for the use of the Churches, sufficiently prove, how utterly incapable they were of producing the inspired Scriptures. Not merely the purity of their principles and their faith in our sacred books, but the capacity of their minds and their faculty of judgment, forbid such a supposition. Their simplicity of character and cast of intellect, make them invaluable, as witnesses to the broad historical facts of Christianity, for which they suffered the loss of all things; but at the same time prove them to be the last persons who could compose sacred books, or frame long and artful documents, or prepare and support and propagate a lie.

Here I pause, and ask any candid hearer, whether on this first historical and naked fact of the Christian books being the real productions of their professed authors, any doubt can remain? Let an objector be governed by historical testimony and the nature of the case, in this, as he uniformly is in all like instances; and let him transfer his objections, if he entertain any, from the authenticity, to the credibility or divine authority of the sacred writings; that is, from the mere external question of, who are the authors of them, to, whether their contents be true.

This is the fair and only fair course. It is thus Christians do as to the Koran of Mahomet. We quarrel not about its authenticity; but we maintain, that the work, though the genuine production of its



professed author—just as the *Morals of Seneca* are genuine—yet affords no sufficient proofs of its being a divine revelation ; we say, there are no evidences to be derived from the contents of the *Koran*, or from the facts accompanying its publication, of a revelation from God ; we say it is a mere compilation from the *Christian Scriptures*, and apocryphal gospels, mixed up with Jewish legends and popular superstitions of Arabia, adapted to the ignorance and vices of the people for whom it was designed. This is a legitimate line of argument. We dispute not against the authenticity, but object to the other pretensions of the *Mahometan record*. We say the matter condemns itself.

But this leads me to make a

**III. General observation, that MEN PRACTICALLY ACT ON THE SLIGHTEST GROUNDS** as to the mere authenticity of writings, where the contents commend themselves to their judgment or taste.

If a literary work be discovered, after having lain hidden for ages, its authenticity is allowed, if the contents bespeak the author's mind and character. I inquire into the authenticity of the greatest Roman historian, *Livy*. What do I find ? I am told that he died about the fourth year of *Tiberius* and the twenty-first of the *Christian æra* ? I am told he published one hundred and forty or more books of history. I see him quoted by contemporary authors. But I hear nothing of his writings afterwards for a thousand years. The chain of testimony is broken to pieces. About thirty books, and some of those imperfect, are published at the close of the 15th century. Further portions are found in the library of *Mayence*. The last five books are found in the *Abbey of St. Gall* in *Switzerland*, in the year 1531. A *Jesuit* discovers some more at *Bamberg*. So lately as the year 1772 a further fragment is added. The authenticity of all these portions is admitted and acted upon by every

critic in every part of Europe, slight as the outward evidence is, upon the mere style and character of the contents.

Again, M. Angelo Maio, about five years since,<sup>a</sup> discovered in the library of the Vatican at Rome, one of the long lost works of Cicero, the valuable and elaborate Dialogues on the Republic. I find a notice of such a work in the other writings of Cicero; but his contemporaries, and the authors of the following ages, afford me no testimony to its authenticity. I am told that the tyranny of the emperors, jealous of the great principles of liberty asserted in that treatise, silenced Seneca, Quintillian, Pliny, Tacitus. Be it so. For thirteen or fourteen centuries I see nothing of it, except in the very few quotations found in Lactantius, St. Augustine, and Macrobius. In the year 1822, the work is discovered, with a Commentary of St. Austin on the Psalms, written over it crosswise, probably in the sixth century, as was frequently practised at that time, to avoid the expense of parchment. M. Maio publishes it—a French scholar, of the first reputation,<sup>a</sup> eagerly makes a translation, and tells us, “it is sufficient to cast an eye on the simple and learned account which M. Maio gives of his labours, to be convinced of an authenticity materially, I will almost say, legally demonstrated. But,” adds the critic, “for men of taste, this authenticity will shine forth yet more in the great characters of patriotic elevation, of genius, and of eloquence, which mark the work. This kind of moral proof is more agreeable to the reader than dissertations on the orthography of an old word, and on the probable dimensions of a letter.” “The immortal character,” he concludes, “of the writer of genius and the Roman Consul, which shines in every page, and in the least traits of the work, gives it a sublime authenticity.”

<sup>a</sup> A. D. 1822 or 3.

<sup>a</sup> M. Villemain.

On such narrow grounds of external testimony do men build. Might I not, then, boldly appeal to the sacred sublimity, the divine wisdom, the unequalled discoveries of grace, the dignity and yet naturalness of style, the clearness and force of the arguments, the circumstantial character of the narrative, the unnumbered incidental agreements, the whole cast and impress of truth, which, as we shall see hereafter, characterizes the New Testament; and might I not leave it to the practical common sense of every pious mind, to determine whether, even if the external testimony to its authenticity were ever so slight, we might not be permitted to repose securely on the inward character of genuineness, the holy stamp and seal of truth, the native impress of veracity and trustworthiness, which commend our sacred books, not to the taste and judgment of a critic merely, but to the enlightened understanding, the best-informed feelings, the conscientious admiration of every candid and serious reader?

But we insist not on this at present. We are now concerned with the argument arising from the various and accumulated external testimony. We shall hereafter unite both kinds of evidences—historical proofs of authenticity beyond any former example, and inward evidences from the character and style of the writings themselves—each so strong, as not to require the other; because each in the highest and most complete form ever exhibited to mankind: and we shall maintain, that if men admit ancient works every day on the slightest outward proof, they are morally obliged to allow the authenticity of the sacred writings, sustained by every outward and every inward species of evidence.

But, we return to the historical point before us, and ask, whether it is not for the objector to establish a contrary case, before he can claim the attention of any reasonable person? We ask, whether the

burden of proof does not lie upon him? If he take it into his head to deny the authentic origin of the scriptures, let him marshal his distinct witnesses to a falsification; let him show clearly **WHEN** and **WHERE** and by **WHOM** and **WHY** these writings were forged, and **WHAT** are the marks which they exhibit of fiction and imposture. A mere doubt thrown out in the nineteenth century is rather too late.

It is thus men uniformly act in all their most important concerns; the burden of proof lies on him who would disturb the beneficial possession of others. The voice of our ordinary laws warrants such a conduct. It goes, indeed, still further. If a legal deed be of only thirty years' standing, and has conveyed an estate, and the estate has been enjoyed by the party to whom the conveyance transmitted it, such a deed is said, in the language of the profession, to prove itself: that is, you are not required to call any attesting witness to prove the handwriting of the party who executed it, nor any one to prove that of the attesting witnesses; but the deed proves itself, because the concomitant facts are held to show sufficiently its authenticity.

Now, how much more forcibly may the Christian church employ such an argument in the case of the deeds of its spiritual inheritance, the books of the New Testament—an inheritance which has been enjoyed from age to age, for seventeen or eighteen hundred years—an inheritance, the records of which may be traced distinctly upwards, from the present to the apostolic times—an inheritance, where no one mark of a fictitious title has ever been shown, where the circumstances under which it was conveyed make a falsification morally impossible; and in the very language and style of which conveyance, all the shining characters of truth are apparent—how much more, I say, may the Christian church oppose to the unbeliever the uninterrupted enjoyment of its bless-

ings for so many ages, as a bar to his cavils, even without entering into the detail of those testimonies to which we have been referring in this discourse—how much more may he hold that the deed proves itself, and that the objector has no claim in reason to be heard, after Christianity has been conveying down from father to son for eighteen centuries, the assurance of pardon and reconciliation, the promises of life and hope, the sacraments and seals of salvation, the consolations of peace and joy, the rules of holiness and virtue, the pledges of future glory and immortality—blessings, not less real, and incomparably more important, than those temporal benefits for which men so eagerly contend. We shrink not, indeed, as we have shown in this, and shall show in our next lecture, from the most minute examination of our titles to these glorious hopes; but we contend that we have been too long in the possession of the beneficial enjoyment of our faith, to allow ourselves to be disturbed by unsupported assertions and general surmises, to which men would never for a moment listen in the most trifling human concern.

It is quite obvious, however, for I must draw towards a CONCLUSION, that the more practically any student is affected with the general importance of religion, the more he will enter into this and every other argument on the great subject of the evidences of Christianity. A right state of heart is the key to all religious inquiries. It enables us easily to estimate the relative importance of different kinds of testimony. And after such general considerations as I have been offering on the authenticity of the New Testament, it leads us to repose with unshaken confidence on that external testimony, which even if it were less complete than it is, would, however, be amply compensated for by the conviction of the inward excellency and holy effects of the revelation

which the Christian records convey. These points, however, will be considered hereafter—a reflection or two only may be here made on the argument so far as we have gone.

1. “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.” Traces of his glory are to be discerned every where. Irradiations of wisdom and condescension and goodness shine out, not only in the highest mysteries of his gospel, but in the lowest external testimonies to the authenticity of the books in which they are unfolded. Every step of the evidences of Christianity has its appropriate light to the humble student. All is agreeable to the purest dictates of the reason with which God has endowed us. The star which conducted the eastern sages to the infant Saviour, did not shine with a brighter or more steady ray, than the historical proof of the genuineness of the divine books. It guides with unerring safety. The ordinary providence of God, in making the series of testimonies to his revelation rest on the same grounds as men are governed by in all like cases, is as full of wisdom, as those extraordinary displays of the same providence, or those more sacred and permanent operations of grace, which are other branches of the general proof which we shall hereafter have to consider. The very circumstance of the admission of the authentic origin of our books by the bitterest adversaries of the early centuries, when a denial of it by them might have embarrassed the Christian advocate in the present day, marks the finger of God. All the calumnies which the adversaries of Christianity actually advanced, have long been refuted and forgotten—the only one that could have been employed against us by the modern unbeliever, was never thought of. Every thing holds together. The lowest chain of evidence is connected with the highest; the simplest deduction of an historical fact

with the most lofty and surprising doctrines of redemption.

II. Enter, then, more deeply and practically into the nature of those blessings which are in so many various ways confirmed to us. This is the end in view. We wish to quicken your sense of the importance of Christianity. Let the authenticity of the record be only the counterpart of the truth of your piety. Let the authentic books be received with an authentic faith, if I may so speak. Let the genuine writings of the apostles be welcomed with a genuine penitence and love. Let there be nothing fictitious in your personal religion, nothing spurious in your life, nothing false or fabricated in your humility or joy. Let the seal and security of the books of revelation correspond with the seal and security of your own interest in its blessings. Let not the authentic word of God be authentic only to condemn your worldliness of mind, your pride, your selfishness, your negligence, your practical unbelief.

Once acquainted practically with the healing efficacy of the gospel, once taught by the secret but effectual aid of the Holy Ghost, once united to our Saviour by faith, we shall use the external evidence in the manner which we ought; not to rely on it as an end, not to be satisfied with it as truth intellectually received, but to rise by it, as by a stepping-stone, to the course on which we are to run the heavenly race; to reach forth by it daily after higher measures of faith and holiness, to employ it devoutly as a cause of constant gratitude to God, to lay it up as a provision against the moments of temptation, as an aid in the instruction of children and servants, as furniture for conversation with the well-disposed inquirer, as means for "giving an answer to every one that asketh us a reason of the hope that is in us." We shall thus feel the ground on which we stand.

We shall be fortified against the impressions of scorn. We shall know how to instruct a candid, or silence a bitter, adversary. We shall put upon each portion of the Christian evidences the particular burden which it is designed to support.

And thus the simple proposition of the apostle in our text, to which I again advert for an instant in concluding the discourse, will join on with all the links in that mighty chain of proof which binds and sustains the Christian doctrine. The "salutation of the apostle with his own hand," as his "token in every epistle," will appear only the first of that series of testimonies to the authenticity of the sacred books, which we have been considering generally now, and which we shall resume in the next lecture; and on the contemplation of which we may well exclaim, in holy admiration: Yes, blessed and only Potentate, we praise Thee for handing down to us in thy wonderful providence, the attestations to the divine writings which we trace in every age; we acknowledge the tokens in every epistle and gospel of thy divine word; and we pray for thy grace so to receive and obey thy will, that we may ourselves have the indications of truth in our own hearts and lives, that we may ourselves be faithful witnesses of thy genuine word, that we may ourselves be, as it were, **AUTHENTIC EPISTLES**, "written not with ink, but with the Spirit of Thee, the living God; not on tables of stone, but on fleshly tables of the heart!"



## LECTURE V.

THE DIRECT PROOF OF THE AUTHENTICITY OF  
THE NEW TESTAMENT.

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 ACTS xxvi. 26.

*For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely; for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner.*

WE offered in the last Lecture some general observations by which the argument for the authenticity of the New Testament might be brought down to the plainest understanding. The proofs on which those observations ultimately rest, together with other arguments in support of the same conclusion, are now to be adverted to. Our discourse will, therefore, be of a different character from the preceding; though touching on many of the same topics. We then confined ourselves to a few remarks addressed to the common sense and feelings of men. We now come to a more calm statement of some of the proofs which lie at the foundation of these appeals.

Let me beg your attention.

I. The testimony to our sacred books can be

TRACED UP STEP BY STEP FROM THE PRESENT TIME TO THE DAYS OF THE APOSTLES.

We asserted this in our general observations. How the proof stands will now be seen.

Let us take first our own country. No one for an instant doubts that the books which we receive in the year 1831, as the genuine writings of the apostles, were so received three hundred years since, at the period of Cranmer and Ridley, and the other reformers.

I ascend, then, a century and a half higher; I ask whether they were not acknowledged just as universally in the fourteenth century, the days of John Wickliffe, who translated these very books into the English language? <sup>1</sup> The fact is undeniable.

I come next to the time of Grosseteste, the celebrated Bishop of Lincoln, and the opponent of Pope Innocent III. in 1240; or to the days of Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury under William Rufus, who wrote a treatise against such as mocked at the inspiration of the scriptures; and I ask, were not the same books universally admitted to be authentic then?

I go up to the reign of Alfred the Great, who translated portions of the Bible into Saxon, in the ninth century. I suppose the very fact of translating our books will be allowed as a proof of the admission of their genuineness.

I find myself next at the age of the Venerable English Presbyter Bede, born in the year 672, whose fame filled the whole Christian world, and who has left comments on the epistles of St. Paul. From him we come to Gregory the Great in 590, who sent over Augustine and his companions for the conversion of our ancestors, on the footing of the authenticity of the scriptures. This brings us up to the reception of the books by the Christian churches on the Continent through Gregory, Theodoret, and Fulgentius, in the sixth century; St. Austin, Jerome, and Chrysostom,

<sup>1</sup> Wickliffe died in the year 1384.

in the fifth ; Ambrose, Athanasius, and Eusebius, of the fourth ; Cyprian, Origen, and Tertullian, of the third ; till we reach Irenæus, (from A.D. 97 to 202,) who was the disciple of Polycarp, the follower of St. John.

Thus the testimony from the present time up to the very days of the apostles, is notorious to all mankind—an unbroken chain, where each link is distinctly visible.

And not only so. Several different series of testimonies may be traced up in the various countries of Christendom ; each independent of the rest. One series in Italy, through Gregory up to Clement of Rome, in the first century. A second in France, through Hilary to Irenæus, Bishop of Lyon. A third in Africa, through Fulgentius, Austin, and Cyprian, to Clemens Alexandrinus and Tertullian.<sup>2</sup> A fourth in Syria, through Ephrem Syrus to Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch in A. D. 107. A fifth in Asia Minor, through Anatolius and Pamphilus to Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, martyred in A. D. 168. All these witnesses testify, not merely that they received our books from their immediate ancestors, but received them as the authentic writings of their respective authors, as having been acknowledged in all the Christian churches from the age of the apostles, and acted upon as the rule of faith and practice. The force of this testimony is convincing to a fair and candid mind.<sup>3</sup> It is a fact unique and irresistible.

## II. But I proceed to notice THE PROGRESS OF

<sup>2</sup> Born about the year 150.

<sup>3</sup> See Lardner, Less, Michaelis, Paley, Bp. Marsh, &c. for the authorities. To the same authors, and to the admirable and laborious T. H. Horne, I refer for many of the materials which I have employed in the present and following Lectures. I mention this once for all. The business of a writer of Evidences in the 19th century, is, very much, selection and compilation.

**THE SETTLEMENT OF THE SACRED CANON** as a further proof of the authenticity of the New Testament.

For if we can discern care and discrimination in the reception of the books of the New Testament ; if we find they were gradually admitted from deliberate conviction and as circumstances naturally called for a decision, we shall have a further ground of confidence in the testimonies we have adduced.

The twenty-seven books of the New Testament, composed by eight different authors, during a space of about sixty years,<sup>4</sup> would of course require some space of time to reach all the various churches in every part of the known world ; especially considering the expense and difficulty of procuring copies before the invention of printing, the poverty of the first Christians, the state of persecution in which they frequently were placed, and the wars which separated kingdoms and nations.

In the fathers, therefore, of the first age who were contemporaries with the apostles, the references to these books are less formal and less numerous and complete, than in the succeeding ones, when education had entwined the language of the New Testament around all the habits and associations of thought in Christians. All the books are not cited. There is no design in the references made to provide materials of proof for a future age. The testimony is unintentional, incidental, given in the simplicity of the heart for direct practical purposes, and therefore far more decisive to us of the authentic origin of our books, than professed dissertations would have been. The quotations and allusions, however, in the six apostolical fathers amount to more than two hundred and twenty,

<sup>4</sup> The Gospel of St. Matthew was published about the year of our Lord 38 ; the Gospel and Revelation of St. John about 96 or 97.

and recognize nineteen or twenty of the sacred books.

In the second century the testimony becomes more express, more full, more in the way of defence of the gospel against heretics or open adversaries. The quotations are so numerous, that a large part of the New Testament might be collected from them. We have thirty-six writers of this age, parts of whose works have come down to us. In Justin Martyr (born A. D. 89, died 164) there are about two hundred citations. In Irenæus (A. D. 97—202) “there are (says Dr. Lardner) more and larger quotations from the small volume of the New Testament, than of all the works of Cicero, though of such uncommon excellence for thought and style, in the writers of all characters for several ages.” The list of quotations in Tertullian occupies nearly thirty folio pages. The testimony of this age begins also to widen by the public reading of the sacred books in the churches, by the collection of them into volumes, by the construction of harmonies; and, towards the close of the century, by translations into other languages, as the Latin and Syriac.

In the third and fourth centuries the progress of the testimony brings us to what may be termed the settlement of the canon. We have more than a hundred authors, whose works, or parts of them, have come down to us, and who bear witness to the genuineness of the books. The quotations are so numerous, that in one Christian Father, Athanasius, there are more than twelve hundred. Catalogues of the books of the New Testament, expressly drawn up to distinguish them from unauthentic writings, are given. Harmonies are formed. Critical examinations of ancient testimony are executed with care. The public reading of the books, and versions of them into all the languages of mankind, are multiplied with the propagation of the gospel. Commentaries are composed. The sacred writings are distinguished by a still more

deep veneration, and called by solemn and accustomed names of honour, as the fountains of divine truth. Collations of different manuscripts are undertaken, and public libraries are devoted to the preservation of copies. Martyrs and confessors cling to the sacred books with ardent affection. Councils acknowledge and bow to their authority.

During these two centuries, so long as doubts were entertained about the authenticity of any particular book, (arising from the brevity of the writing, as the Second and Third Epistle of St. John and the Epistle of Jude, or from the sacred author having concealed his name, as in the Epistle to the Hebrews, or from the particular abuse made of any particular book, as the Revelation of St. John,) such doubts were openly avowed. We have the grounds of evidence laid before us in Eusebius, (A. D. 315,) and can form a judgment upon the question for ourselves.

The books, concerning which any hesitation prevailed, are seven, and those the precise ones which, from circumstances might be expected to be thus doubted of—and which do not, in fact, touch the general truth of the gospel doctrine.<sup>a</sup> The rest were universally received as genuine; or, as Eusebius says, were the *Ὁμολογούμεναι γραφαί*, “The confessed and openly recognized Scriptures.” And the remaining seven were received by the vast majority of Christians, though a few doubted of their authenticity. Eusebius expressly speaks of them as *γνωρίμων ὅμως τοῖς πολλοῖς*—“writings acknowledged by most to be genuine.” And he distinguishes them from the spurious writings which form his third class. All hesitation was however gradually dissipated; so that by the time of Jerome and Augustine (A. D. 342—420) many catalogues are given with all our present books,

<sup>a</sup> They are the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Epistles of James and Jude, the Second Epistle of St. Peter, the Second and Third of John, and the Book of the Revelation.

but including none other. This deliberation in the ancient Christians strengthens exceedingly the weight of the attestation which they give, because it marks simplicity of intention, care, uprightness, that discrimination which is productive of confidence of mind in those who are called to examine and compare testimonies. I proceed to another argument.

III. Wherever you take A SPECIMEN out of this mass of evidence, whether from the first or any following century, THERE ARE ALL THE MARKS OF INTEGRITY AND TRUTH.

What can be more simple and yet more satisfactory, than the language of Clement, Bishop of Rome, from A. D. 91 to 110, in his Letter addressed to the Corinthians, in which he refers to the Epistle of the apostle Paul to that church, with the perfect familiarity and confidence of one who knew that every Corinthian Christian was acquainted with that sacred writing. "Take into your hands the Epistle of the blessed apostle Paul; what has he written to you in the beginning of Christianity? Truly by divine inspiration he gave you directions concerning himself and Cephas and Apollos."

To the age of this Epistle of Clement, we have the testimony of Irenæus, (A. D. 97—202,) who says, "It was written by Clement, who had seen the blessed apostles and conversed with them." Again, Dionysius, Bishop of Corinth, (A. D. 170,) states that this Epistle of Clement was accustomed to be read in that church. Eusebius, the faithful ecclesiastical historian, (A. D. 315,) also bears witness to it. Thus the truth and importance of Clement's testimony are clear—and what is his testimony? He has fifty or sixty quotations from the New Testament, or allusions to the language of it, from nineteen of the sacred books. So irresistible is our argument from the beginning.

Shall I then stop to refer to Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, in the year 70? Shall I remind you that he is spoken of by Irenæus (*opus* A. D. 230), and Eusebius and Jerome? A. D. 315 and 420. Shall I tell you that he speaks of the gospels and epistles as already collected into volumes? How common the volumes were we know not; but the familiarity with which he speaks of them, sustains the acknowledged authenticity of most of our books. He says in substance, that "in order to understand the will of God, he fled to the gospels which he believed no less than if Christ in the flesh had been speaking to him; and to the writings of the apostles, whom he esteemed as the presbytery of the whole Christian church." His words are, "Fleeing to the gospels as to the flesh of Jesus, and to the apostles as to the presbytery of the church."

If I refer to Polycarp, it is only to quote the words at the close of the account of his martyrdom, (A. D. 168.) to show the care with which the copyists proceeded. "These things Caius hath extracted from the writings of Irenæus, the disciple of Polycarp, who also lived with Irenæus. And I, Socrates of Corinth, have transcribed from the copy of Caius: grace be with you all. And I, Pionius, have transcribed from the fore-mentioned, having made search for it and received the knowledge of it from a revelation made to me by Polycarp, when now almost obsolete." This Pionius was afterwards himself a martyr.

If I proceed to the second century, what choice shall I make from the almost innumerable citations of Justin Martyr, Irenæus, Clement Alexandrinus, Tertullian, and others, who lived in the very next age to the apostle John?

Shall I tell you that Justin Martyr calls the gospels, "The Memoirs," "Memoirs of the Apostles," "Christ's Memoirs," and testifies, "that on the day called Sunday, an assembly takes place of all the inha-



bitants of the towns, or villages, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are publicly read as long as the time permits ; and when the reader has ended, the president by a discourse exhorts and persuades them to imitate those excellent things." This is not merely a dry testimony to authenticity, but a testimony clothed with facts, religious solemnities and public reading and exposition, and which places beyond all question the undisputed authority of the sacred books.

I cannot stop to quote Irenæus, though he gives a critical account of the manner in which the four gospels were written, with the care almost of a modern divine.

I pass by Clemens also and others, in order to show from Tertullian the precision with which the divine books were traced up to the apostles. "Although Marcion rejects the Revelation of St. John, yet the order of Bishops reckoned up from the beginning, shows John to be the author. Thus the genuineness of the rest is acknowledged. I say, therefore, that in the churches, not only Apostolical, but in all united with them in the communion of the sacrament, that gospel of St. Luke which we especially defend, is supported ever since its publication." This, you will observe, was written about the year of Christ 200—not in the year 1830, as from the clearness of the reasoning we might have almost supposed. Could we have stronger proof, if we had been contemporaries ?

But I must hasten through the third and fourth centuries, though witnesses call to me on all hands, in order to appeal to St. Jerome, (A. D. 342—420,) esteemed the most learned of the Fathers, who resided long in Palestine, and who gives us three formal catalogues of the books of the New Testament, each of them exactly as we have them now, except that in the first he expresses a doubt about the Epistle to the Hebrews. Jerome collated many ancient Greek copies

of the New Testament. He informs Damasus, Bishop of Rome, that "as copies were dispersed over the world, he sat as an arbiter, and distinguished the copies which agreed with the truth of the Greek, from others." It is not a little curious that Father Simon, about an hundred years since, gives us the following words, transcribed from the end of an excellent Latin manuscript, nearly nine hundred years old: "The library of St. Jerome, presbyter of Bethlehem, according to the Greek, collated by the most correct copies." We have here, therefore, a critical edition of the New Testament, published one thousand four hundred years since, formed on the collation of ancient manuscripts, (ancient, that is, in the fourth century,) and containing the same books as our present canon. Can evidence be more decisive?

I ought to pass on to other topics; but first let me give you a specimen of testimonies which include some mark of the love which the primitive Christians bore to the holy books: for I am most anxious to leave a sacred impression of the value of Christianity on the minds of the young. Pamphilus the Martyr (A. D. 294) "was remarkable," we are told, "above all men for a most sincere zeal for the divine books; he not only lent copies of the scriptures to be read, but most cheerfully made a gift of them to men and women who were eager to read them."

Valens, a deacon, who suffered with Pamphilus, "was so well skilled in the divine scriptures, that there was no discernible difference between his reading of them and his reciting them by heart, though it were whole pages together."

"It was one of the affecting scenes of the persecution, (A. D. 303,) to see the sacred and divine books burned in market places. The martyrs were interrogated if they had any divine books, or parchments. They replied, We have; but we do not give them up;

it is better for us to be burned with fire, than to give up the divine scriptures."

Once more, the Emperor Constantine "from the time of his conversion (A. D. 312) resolved to give himself up to the reading of the scriptures. He had a kind of church in his palace, where, taking the sacred books in his own hands, he attentively read and meditated upon the divine oracles before the whole assembly of his courtiers." On one occasion he wrote thus to Eusebius: "The city that bears our name (Constantinople) through the goodness of Providence increases daily, and there will be occasion for erecting in it more churches. Wherefore we hope you will approve of our design, and take care to procure fifty copies of the divine scriptures, which you know to be necessary in churches; of fine parchment, legible, and easily portable, that they may be the fitter for use; transcribed by such as are skilful in the art of fair writing." The orders were obeyed, and the copies sent in magnificently bound. Need I say that such love to the authentic writings of the apostles carries with it something more than cold assent to their authority? The martyrs at the close of the third century, the Christian Emperor at the beginning of the fourth, must have had the most complete assurance of their genuineness, to act with the sincerity and zeal, and make the sacrifices, which we have been stating.

IV. A very important proof of the authenticity of our sacred books is derived from THE ADMISSIONS OF HEATHEN AND JEWISH ADVERSARIES, and the conduct of the numerous SECTS AND PARTIES in the church from the earliest age. To this we have more than once referred; but a specimen of the sort of proof thus obtained, belongs to this place.

The heathen philosopher Celsus, (about the A. D. 175,) advances all kinds of objections against

Christianity with much acuteness, resentment, and scorn. But he never calls in question the genuineness of the New Testament. He argues from the facts and doctrines they contain, as the authentic writings of their respective authors. Nothing can prove more clearly, not only that such books did really exist in the second century, but that they were universally received by Christians, and that nothing could be alleged against them in that respect.

Porphyry was in the third century what Celsus had been in the second—an embittered, powerful heathen opponent. Yet he admits our books. His testimony is the more pertinent and conclusive, because he showed that he would have denied their authenticity, if it had been possible; for he did actually venture to deny (without reason, indeed, but still he did deny) the genuineness of the Prophet Daniel, and asserted that it was written after the times of Antiochus Epiphanes.

Julian, in the fourth century, comes in with a testimony, unwilling indeed as a heathen emperor, but the more decisive, because he had once professed the Christian faith. What course does he take? Does he call into question the truth of our writings? Does he charge the Christians with imposing false books upon mankind? No. He allows the facts of Christianity, and argues upon our gospels as the admitted works of the apostles and disciples of our Lord.

The testimony of heretics is of almost equal importance. We have seen in our own day what eagerness of contention has been excited by the one single disputed text on the heavenly witnesses, in the fifth chapter of the First Epistle of St. John. For half a century has the church been filled with the vehement controversy. It is quite certain, therefore, that in the bitterness of the Arian heresy, in the fourth century, if any thing solid could have been alleged against the

genuineness of our sacred books, it would have been brought forward with avidity. Some passages and some books were, in fact, denied by Marcion and a few wild enthusiasts of earlier days; but after the settlement of the canon, men of all sects and heresies admitted our writings. An Arian, in a conference with St. Austin, says: "If you allege any thing from the divine Scriptures, which are common to all, I must hear; but what is not in the scriptures deserves no regard." And at the Council of Nice, (A.D. 325,) where three hundred and eighteen bishops, besides innumerable presbyters, deacons, and others, were assembled, on the occasion of the Arian heresy, "The emperor," says Theodoret, "recommended to the bishops to decide all things by the scriptures. It is a pity, he said, that now when their enemies were subdued, they should differ and be divided among themselves; especially when they had the doctrine of the Holy Ghost in writing."<sup>6</sup>

From such witnesses to the authenticity of the New Testament who can turn away? If this evidence is not deemed satisfactory, it must arise from a want, I do not say of faith, but of common candour of mind. I am aware, indeed, that we cannot put those who are not familiar with ecclesiastical history, in possession of the sort of plenary conviction which fills the mind of the literary and well-informed student, who is acquainted with the names I cite, who knows all the chief events and dates of past times, and has been accustomed to historical researches—but then any hearer of good sense and honesty can understand enough of the statement to see the mass of SOLID AND UN-

<sup>6</sup> Lardner thinks that, as this last circumstance is not mentioned by Eusebius, but rests only on the authority of Theodoret, it had perhaps better not be pressed. Still he raises no objection, except the negative one of wanting the confirmation of Eusebius.

**DISPUTED FACTS** adduced in favour of the Christian scriptures. And his want of habits of historical inquiry holds much more against his receiving the mere cavils of unbelievers, than it does against his practically submitting to this part of the evidences of his faith. I want only a right temper of mind in the hearer, and I leave to his conscientious judgment the determination of the cause. But I proceed to an argument palpable almost to our senses.

**V. For the NUMBER AND ANTIQUITY OF OUR MANUSCRIPTS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT** is an argument for the authenticity of its sacred contents.

The greater part of the apocryphal books are either entirely lost, or are preserved by a single manuscript. Our most authentic and most admired classics, as Herodotus, are known only from ten or fifteen manuscripts; many are come down to us, after lying hid for ages, in one manuscript only. Now the manuscripts of our sacred books abound in every ancient library in every part of Christendom. They amount in the whole to many thousands. About five hundred have been actually examined and compared or collated, with extraordinary care. Many of them run up to the eighth, seventh, sixth, fifth, and fourth centuries; the Codex Bezae, found in the monastery of Irenæus, at Lyon in France, and presented by the reformer whose name it bears, to the University of Cambridge, is supposed by Dr. Kipling, the editor of the facsimile of it, to be of the second century. The Codex Alexandrinus and Codex Vaticanus are supposed to be of the fourth. Now these manuscripts push back our proof to the age next but one or two, to that when the last of the apostles died, and join on with the date of the manuscripts compared by Jerome and Eusebius, (A.D. 315—420,) and thus bring us up, as it were, to the very times of the promulgation of the gospel.

Let any one compare the gospels and epistles as

extant in our ancient manuscripts, with the passages cited in Jerome, Eusebius, Tertullian, Irenæus, who had the very originals before them, or the immediate transcripts from those originals, and he will find almost the whole of our present canon.<sup>7</sup>

The prodigious number of these manuscripts, the distant countries whence they were collected, and this identity of their contents with the quotations in the Fathers of different ages, place the New Testament incomparably above all other ancient works in point of evidence of authenticity.

And this leads me to produce a noble passage from Tertullian, who was born about fifty or sixty years after the death of St. John. In the thirty-sixth chapter of his work against Heresies, he says :

“Come now, thou who wilt exercise thy curiosity more profitably in the business of thy salvation, run through the apostolical churches, in which the very chairs of the apostles still preside, in which their authentic letters (some render it, “original”—*literæ authenticæ*) are recited, sounding forth the voice and representing the countenance of each. Is Achaia near you, you have Corinth. If you are not far from Macedonia, you have Thessalonica. If you are near to Italy, you have Rome, from whence also our assertion will be readily confirmed.”

What a striking appeal is this to the actual original Greek of the New Testament books, perhaps to the very autographs of the divine writers—or if the word *authenticæ* means only, well-attested—yet to the undoubted transcripts of the sacred epistles ! When we connect this with the fine expression, that “the very chairs of the apostles still presided,” as it were, “in their respective churches,” and that their epistles,

<sup>7</sup> This further proves that the sacred books have come down to us uncorrupted. The various readings in different manuscripts do not affect a single doctrine or precept of the Christian revelation.

when recited, "sounded forth the voice and represented the countenance of each apostle;" and when we remember that those churches are appealed to, and those only, to which the sacred letters were addressed, and that the inquirer is sent by Tertullian (in the second century, be it noted) to examine the books for himself;—I say, when we consider all this, and associate it in our minds with the critical revision of ancient manuscripts made by Eusebius and Jerome in the fourth and fifth centuries, and our Codex Bezae, Codex Alexandrinus, and Codex Vaticanus, probably of the very same date, now existing—I ask whether it does not present the proof of the authenticity of the New Testament before the very eyes, and render it palpable almost to the senses of mankind?

VI. I add that NONE OF THESE EXTERNAL PROOFS OF AUTHENTICITY can be adduced for the apocryphal books of the New Testament; which exhibit, indeed, every internal mark of being unauthentic and spurious. It is no indiscriminate admission, therefore, for which we plead. We show that the marks of authenticity are actually wanting in all pretended sacred writings.

1. We have no proof that any of them existed in the first century. 2. They are not quoted by the apostolical Fathers. 3. Few or no manuscripts of them exist. 4. They were not read in the churches of Christians. 5. Were not admitted into their volumes. 6. Do not appear in their catalogues. 7. Were not noticed by their adversaries. 8. Were not alleged by different parties as of authority in their controversies. 9. Were not subjects amongst them of commentaries, versions, collations, expositions. 10. Were passed over in silence, or actually rejected during the three first centuries, and reprobated almost universally by Christian writers of succeeding ages. That is, they are not authentic.<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Paley.



Besides this total want of external evidence of their genuineness, there is the strongest internal evidence in proof of their being spurious. 1. For they propose doctrines and practices contrary to those which are certainly known to be true. 2. They are filled with absurd and frivolous details. 3. They relate as miracles, stories both useless and improbable. 4. They mention things which are later than the time when the individual author lived whose name the book bears. 5. Their style is totally different from that of the genuine books of the New Testament. 6. They assert things in direct contradiction to authentic history, both sacred and profane. 7. They contain studied imitations of passages in the genuine scriptures. 8. They abound with gross falsehoods. That is, they are spurious; and illustrate by a perfect contrast the undoubted authenticity of the canonical books.<sup>9</sup>

But this leads us to another argument.

VII. The **STYLE AND MANNER** of the books of the New Testament furnish an unanswerable proof of their being genuine.

I observed in the last Lecture, that there was nothing in the style or contents of the New Testament inconsistent with the age and characters of the professed authors; and that the inward traces of genuineness and truth shone brightly throughout the books of it.

We have just been pointing out the marks of spuriousness in the apocryphal books, from their gross defects in these very respects.

A nearer view of the contents of the Christian books will bring out a positive evidence of the most undeniable kind in favour of their authenticity.

For the style of the New Testament agrees with the times of the apostles of our Lord, and with no

<sup>9</sup> T. H. Horne, i. 721.

other. It is Greek ; not the pure Greek which the critic perhaps would most admire ; but Greek intermingled with Hebrew and Syriac idioms. It is a language which no one could write, but a person who had acquired a knowledge of the Greek after an education in a country where Chaldee and Syriac were the vernacular tongues. The destruction of Jerusalem, and the total subversion of the Jewish polity within forty years after our Lord's resurrection, made so entire a change in the language, associations, habits, familiar knowledge, terms of expression of the dispersed Jewish people, that an impostor at any time posterior to the death of the last of the apostles, would have written in a different style from that of the New Testament. A Greek or Roman Christian would have wanted the peculiar tincture of the Jewish literature prevalent before the fall of Jerusalem. A Jewish convert would have been wanting in the intermixed style and manner of the Hellenistic Jew. The idiomatic character lasted only for a brief period, and then perished. Even in the second century, the language of the Christian writers in their works now extant, infallibly proves that the New Testament was not produced in that age. A relater of falsehoods could by no stretch of genius have raised up from nothing, and have preserved with undeviating uniformity, the peculiarities and familiar colloquial idioms of a lost language.

This argument is strengthened by considering the minute and circumstantial character of the narratives of the New Testament, and the perpetual allusions to passing events in the epistolary parts of it. All is in detail. You have the names of friends and enemies, the circumstances of time and place, the occasions which introduced, and the consequences that followed each action. You see every thing. You seem to move in the train of our Lord or his apostles. The narrative no sooner changes its scene, than a new set of names, occa-

sions, incidents, personages, facts,—all the most natural imaginable—surround it.

Then there are numerous, and, so to speak, fearless allusions to complicated events, to different branches of families, which bearing a common appellation, confound at first sight the most tenacious recollection, and yet are found to be always correctly alluded to. The usages of the Jews, their divisions into sects, their popular opinions, are all described or referred to with the ease of things perfectly familiar. The different high-priests, the various Roman governors, the Herods, the geographical position of different places in Palestine, are minutely, and, as we should say, speaking of other books, unnecessarily brought in. The accuracy of all these can only be accounted for by one supposition—the truth of the story. Fictitious works never descend into such particulars.<sup>10</sup> Manetho's account of the Egyptian dynasties is vague and general: whilst Thucydides' and Cæsar's authentic histories of the wars of which they were eye-witnesses, abound in circumstances of time, person, place. The circumstantiality of the New Testament proclaims its authenticity; and when connected with the single fact, that the whole scene was swept away before the middle of the first century, makes that authenticity certain and palpable.

Further, notwithstanding all this copiousness of allusion, the sacred writers agree with each other. Eight authors, composing twenty-seven works, during an interval of sixty years, with no appearance of concert or symptom of artificial method; but on the contrary, with a thousand seeming disagreements, and

<sup>10</sup> The French author to whom I referred in my last Lecture, gives an example of a work which professed to be the production of the age of Louis XIV.—merely one hundred years since—the spuriousness of which was detected by the want of circumstantiality, of minuteness of reference and naturalness of remark in the narrative.—*Pensées Judic.* ut supra.

many actual obscurities in point of arrangement and order—writing also on every kind of topic connected with the religion they promulgated, and addressing different churches on different points of doctrine and practice—I say, the substantial harmony of these writings stamps upon them an authenticity which nothing can impeach. A thousand undesigned coincidences have been pointed out between the Gospels, the Acts, and Epistles,<sup>11</sup> too slight in themselves to have been concerted, and yet when brought out, flashing conviction upon every mind. During the space of eighteen centuries, not one contradiction has been established against our sacred books; and for this plain reason—they are the genuine production of the inspired writers.

The confirmation of the chief facts recorded in the New Testament by Heathen and Jewish authors, is a further evidence of authenticity. Every thing that admits of being proved by the writings of contemporary historians—by Josephus, Tacitus, Suetonius, &c. as we shall see more fully in the next discourse—is so proved. The substratum of the gospel history is found in the writings of the most bitter adversaries.

Again, the openness and simplicity of the whole manner and cast of the New Testament writings, confirm the argument of authenticity. A fraudulent composition may always be detected, in one part or other, by artificial attempts to hide some things, and display others, according as a human and debased prudence dictates. Commendations are dealt out—irritation and prejudice appear—apologies are made—effect is studied—the passions of men and the opinions of the times are consulted—curiosity is gratified at one time, national pride at another. Now the divine scriptures stand free from all this. Their simplicity

<sup>11</sup> By Dr. Paley in his *Horæ Paulinæ*, and lately by Mr. Blunt in his *Veracity of the Gospels*.

and naturalness are inimitable. The New Testament has the frankness and straight-forwardness of an honest witness in a court of justice, who carries on his countenance and in all his expressions the credentials of truth. Our sacred writers let every thing speak for itself. They conceal nothing, they make no apologies, they consult no popular prepossessions, they hide no faults in their own conduct, they bestow no commendation, they utter no expressions of wonder, they flatter no one. They speak with the candour and openness of persons perfectly familiar with the truth of all they narrate, and who know they are addressing contemporaries as familiar with the facts as themselves. There is not a chapter read in our churches which should not strike every pious hearer as incapable of being an invention.

In short, it is not too much to say, that such is the style and manner of our divine books, as to evince their authenticity, independently of that mass of direct historical testimony which is increasing in every age.

For this is a further argument.

VIII. The UNEXPECTED CONFIRMATIONS which have arisen in different ages, and from the most opposite quarters, to the authenticity of the New Testament.

About the close of the sixteenth century, the then Bishop of Antioch sent over to Europe a Syriac version of the New Testament, in the language of the inhabitants of Palestine, where the Christian religion was first propagated. The work, previously, was utterly unknown in Europe. It was found upon examination to be a manuscript, probably of the second century. It agrees entirely with our canon so far as it extends; for it contains twenty-four books, only wanting the second and third of St. John and the Revelation. This striking and unlooked for confirmation of the authenticity of the New Testament, received

additional importance by a copy of the same Syriac version brought over from Syria by Dr. Claudius Buchanan in 1806, and presented to the University of Cambridge. The manuscript is supposed to be of the seventh century, and contains twenty-six books,—all, except the Revelation.<sup>12</sup> The sections of each book, and sometimes the words, are numbered.<sup>13</sup> The addition of two books in this copy, and the marks of extreme care in the transcription, give a considerable value to this discovery in itself, besides that derived from its falling in with the previous copy of the second century. Both concur in supporting our authentic books.

Again, our Sir Thomas Rowe, in the year 1628, brought over a manuscript of part of the sacred Bible, as a present to King Charles the first, from Cyrillus Lucaris, patriarch of Constantinople. It is called the Codex Alexandrinus, because he had brought it from Alexandria, and it is now in the British Museum. Dr. Woide, who published a fac-simile of the New Testament, in 1786, considers it of the date of about A. D. 370. It agrees with our books.

Once more. In 1817, M. Angelo Mai, whom we have already mentioned, discovered in the library of St. Ambrose, a part of the hitherto unknown, Mæso-Gothic Version of the New Testament, made by

<sup>12</sup> See Dr. Yeates' interesting account of this MS.

<sup>13</sup> The *Title* to St. John's Gospel is, "The Holy Gospel preached by John the Apostle." The *Subscript*, "Here endeth the holy Gospel preached by the Apostle John; preached at Ephesus. Its words are 1938." At the close of the four Gospels is the *General Subscript*, "Here end, by the aid of divine grace, the books of the holy Gospel of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. All the words, according to their letters, are 9937." At the close of the Epistle to the Hebrews is a *second Subscript*, "Here endeth the writings of the fourteen Epistles of the blessed Paul, the holy Apostle and wise master-builder of the Church of Christ."

Ulphilas, the Bishop of the Mæso-Goths, in the year 370. We had previously only some considerable portions of the four gospels, and fragments of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans. Two MS. copies of the thirteen Epistles are now found, and some parts of the Old Testament; which last are the more valuable, because not the smallest portion of the Old Testament was known to be in existence, and they contain fragments of the books of Kings, which refute the tale of Gibbon, repeated after Philostorgius the Arian,<sup>14</sup> "that Ulphilas had prudently suppressed the four books of Kings, as they might tend to irritate the fierce and sanguinary spirit of his countrymen." It is thus that the scoffs and blunders of the unbeliever are from time to time exposed by facts.

I come now to a most curious and important discovery. Eusebius, (A.D. 315,) speaking of the writings of the "ancient ecclesiastical men," says: "There is also come to our hands a dialogue, a disputation of Caius, held at Rome in the time of Zephyrinus, (A. D. 195—214,) with Proclus, a patron of the Cataphrygian heresy, in which he reproves the rashness and audacity of his adversary, in composing new writings or scriptures, and makes mention of only thirteen Epistles of the holy Apostle, not reckoning that of the Hebrews." St. Jerome, in his book of illustrious men, refers to the same work, and says, it was a very celebrated disputation.

After citing this passage of Eusebius, Dr. Lardner expresses his deep regret that Eusebius had not given us the catalogue itself; our first complete one being that of Athanasius, 120 or 130 years later.

Now it is remarkable, that in the year 1740, more than fifteen centuries after the time of Caius, a fragment, which is most probably a part of the lost dialogue—and if not, is clearly of the same age—was

<sup>14</sup> Gibbon, vi. 269. Lardner, in loc. Horne.

discovered by Muratori, in a MS. volume in the Ambrosian library at Milan, written in the eighth century. The present learned President of Magdalen College, Oxford, has published a critical edition of the fragment.<sup>16</sup> It was probably written towards the close of the second century, if not earlier. It contains not merely a distinct reference to certain books of the New Testament by name, but a formal catalogue of those sacred writings, with observations on the circumstances connected with them. It makes a marked distinction also between them and Ecclesiastical and Apocryphal books. The language is striking, "It is not fit that gall should be mingled with honey." In a fragment it is impossible to determine what books might be enumerated in the lost parts; but it actually contains a list of twenty-two books of our Canon.

As the fragment is exquisite, and has never, I believe, appeared in our language, I shall be excused if I attempt a translation, so far as the imperfect state of the reading will allow. It begins of course abruptly.

— "At which, however, he was present, and thus he described things. In the third place, is the book of the gospel according to St. Luke. Luke, the physician, wrote it in due order, in his own name, after the ascension of Christ, when Paul had taken him with him, as one also studious of truth. Yet neither did he see the Lord in the flesh; but as he had a perfect knowledge of every thing, he begins to speak from the birth of John. In the fourth place, the gospel of John, one of the disciples. He upon being urged to write it by the fellow-disciples and bishops, said to those around him, 'Fast with me now for three days, and what shall be revealed to each, let us communicate, that we may know whether the gospel shall be written or not.' The same night it was revealed to An-

<sup>16</sup> Dr. Martin Routh, in his *Reliquiæ Sacræ*, Oxon. 1814, vol. ii. 1—32. and vol. iv. 1—37. He has completed what Muratori, Gallandius, Stoschius, Keiliius, Mosheim, and Freindall had begun.



drew, one of the apostles, that John should write every thing in his own name, all the rest giving it their authority. And, therefore, although various points are taught in the several gospels, yet the faith of those who believe does not differ; since by one guiding and over-ruling Spirit, the same things are declared in all the books concerning the nativity, the passion, the resurrection, the conversation of the Lord with his disciples, and his two-fold advent; the first when he was despised in his humiliation, as it was foretold; the second which is yet future, when he shall be glorious in royal power. What wonder, therefore, if John so confidently declares every thing in his epistles also, saying of himself, *Those things which we have seen with our eyes, and heard with our ears, and our hands have handled, have we written.* For thus he professes himself, not only a beholder and hearer, but also a writer in due order, of all the wonderful things of the Lord.<sup>1</sup>

“But the Acts of all the Apostles are written in one book. Luke comprehends them in the work addressed to the excellent Theophilus, because every thing took place in his presence: as other accounts clearly declare the sufferings of Peter and the journey of Paul from Rome to Spain.<sup>2</sup>

“But the Epistles of Paul, what they are, from what place they were sent, or from what cause, he himself declares to those who are willing to inquire; first of all forbidding heresy and schism to the Corinthians, and circumcision to the Galatians. He wrote, however, more at length to the Romans, according to the order of the scriptures, teaching that Christ was the chief end of them. Each of which things we must of necessity discuss, since the blessed apostle Paul himself, following the order of his senior John, writes only to seven churches by name, in such order as this; first to the Corinthians; secondly to the Ephesians; thirdly to the Philippians; fourthly to the Colossians; fifthly to the Galatians; sixthly to the Thessalonians; seventhly to the Romans. But although

<sup>1</sup> Thus we have the four Gospels acknowledged as canonical.

<sup>2</sup> The Acts of the Apostles are next admitted as canonical. The histories of Peter and Paul, afterwards referred to, are not canonical, but are merely “other accounts.”

he wrote a second time to the Corinthians and Thessalonians for reproof, yet but one church is acknowledged, scattered over the whole world. And John also in the Apocalypse, although he writes to seven churches, yet speaks to all.<sup>3</sup> Further, one Epistle to Philemon, and one to Titus, and two to Timothy, from affection and love; yet are they sanctified and counted sacred, in the honour of the Catholic church, and in the direction of ecclesiastical discipline.<sup>4</sup> There is circulated also another to the Laodiceans, and another to the Alexandrians forged<sup>5</sup> in the name of Paul, to support the heresy of Marcion; and many more which cannot be received into the Catholic church. For it is not fit that gall should be mixed with honey. But an Epistle of Jude and two of the above-written John, are accounted genuine in the Catholic church.<sup>6</sup> And the Book of Wisdom written by the friends of Solomon in honour of him.<sup>7</sup> The apocalypses of John and Peter are the only ones we receive, which last some Christians do not allow to be read in the church.<sup>8</sup> Further, the Shepherd was written by Hermas, very lately, in our time, in the city of Rome, Bishop Pius his brother filling the See of the city of Rome. And therefore it ought indeed to be read; but it cannot be published in the church to the people to the end of time, either

<sup>3</sup> See Note 7.

<sup>4</sup> Thirteen Epistles of St. Paul. This agrees with Eusebius's account. The Epistle to the Hebrews is not noticed.

<sup>5</sup> The condemnation of the Apochryphal books is very important: he calls them forgeries.

<sup>6</sup> Three of the Catholic Epistles are canonical.

<sup>7</sup> This sentence is obscure. It has nothing to do with the canon of the New Testament. Could it have slipped in from any other part of the MSS.? What has the Book of Wisdom to do with the New Testament?

<sup>8</sup> A doubt only is here cast upon the Apocalypse of St. Peter. But the strong terms in which the Apocalypse of St. John is mentioned in the preceding passage, as well as here, clearly mark the canonical authority of that book. It is possible that the Apocalypse of Peter may refer to that part of the second Epistle, where "the New Heavens and New Earth" is spoken of.

amongst the prophets whose number is complete, or amongst the apostles.<sup>9</sup>

“But we receive nothing whatever of Arsinoes, or Valentinus, or Mitiades, who also have written a new Book of Psalms for Marcion; the supporters, together with Basilides, of the Asiatic Cataphryges.”<sup>10</sup>

When we consider that this statement was made in a public and celebrated disputation at Rome—in the face of heretics—for the very purpose of distinguishing authentic from pretended books of scripture,—and this scarcely a century after the death of St. John—that moreover it is referred to by Eusebius in the beginning of the fourth, and again by Jerome in the beginning of the fifth century, as of acknowledged authority; and that it was discovered only in 1740, it must be allowed to afford an irresistible confirmation of our argument. A manuscript fragment of the second century, unexpectedly discovered in the eighteenth, is a proof as extraordinary as it is conclusive. It establishes the whole account of the authenticity.

Thus, for eighteen hundred years, the evidences of authenticity have been increasing, by the discovery of external testimonies; whilst the more the internal style and structure of the sacred books have been studied during the same length of time, the stronger has been the conviction of their genuineness on every candid mind.

I add as a last confirmation of all the above proofs—

**IX. That our sacred volume is UNIQUE AND UNPARALLELED in the history of the world.**

There has never been any work like it, or pretend-

<sup>9</sup> Observe here the due respect given to the Ecclesiastical books, and yet the difference put between them and the canonical on the one hand, and the Apocryphal on the other.

<sup>10</sup> I refer the learned reader to the dissertation of Dr. Routh for an explanation of these obscure expressions.

ing to be like it. No books were ever written, or professed to be written, by the founders of a religion, and exposed from the first to the view of mankind, but the records (I include the Old Testament) of the Christian faith.

Heathenism had no sacred books, no exposition of truth, no authentic writings submitted by its founders to the view of mankind. Heathenism crept into the world from the remains of the original revelation to our first parents, aided by the light of natural conscience, the policy of human governments, and the scattered rays of the light of Judaism. But there was no promulgation, there were no sacred books, there were no expositions of doctrine and duty, published by the founders and authors of the system. The Koran of Mahomet is only a corruption of our Christian books, and taken from them. The Shasters of the Hindoos were never pretended to be the writings of the first founders of the religion, were never promulgated, never submitted to the popular eye, and make no profession of teaching the body of mankind the knowledge of their duties.

The sacred volume remains ALONE, WITHOUT A RIVAL, the genuine production of the first founders of Christianity, offered to the examination of all, and standing, like the works of the Almighty in the wonders of creation, the monument of its own divine original—a book, occupied in the popular instruction of mankind, and level to the capacity, and adapted to the necessities of all—a book, which needing less of external evidence than any other ancient work, is surrounded by every species of it in unequalled accumulation and force.

Such then is the summary of the arguments for the authenticity of the New Testament. Such are the proofs which sustain the observations of the last Lecture.

It was then shown generally, that the genuineness of our books is supported by the same kind of arguments as men constantly employ on all similar occasions—that not one mark of spuriousness appears in our divine books—that it was morally impossible, from the circumstances of the case, that they could be forged—that men are continually admitting ancient books on the slightest external evidence—and that every external and internal proof unites to satisfy a reasonable and candid enquirer of the truth of the New Testament.<sup>16</sup>

These general observations have been now established by actually tracing out the transmission of our books---by noticing the progress of the settlement of the Canon---by observing in all the specimens of the testimonies of Christian writers, the utmost sincerity---by weighing the admission of heathen adversaries and heretics---by running up our numerous ancient manuscripts now extant, to the manuscripts of Jerome and to the autographs, or immediate copies of autographs, in the hands of Tertullian---by considering that the Apocryphal books want every one of these marks of authenticity, and are branded with every criterion of spuriousness---by adverting to the style and manner of the sacred penmen; and to the unexpected confirmations which are continually arising from the most extraordinary quarters---and by observing, finally, that our sacred volume stands unparalleled in the history of the world.

Let me for one instant observe, in conclusion, that it is **THE LOVE OF CHRISTIANS TO THE BIBLE**, which has furnished us with the accumulated testimony which we have been reviewing. Can we fail, then, to admire that care of Divine Providence, which made the spontaneous dictate of gratitude for redemption, the means of pouring down upon us the stream

of proofs of the record by which it was conveyed? Had the cold and theoretical Christianity which now prevails, been all that the first converts knew, our religion would have expired at its birth. It was the holy ardour of their love---it was the emotion of their gratitude for the discoveries made in the authentic scriptures---it was the astonishment excited by the mysteries of redemption, the agony of the cross, the glory of the resurrection, the consolation of the divine Comforter---it was the light and grace shed upon the miseries of mankind by the Sun of righteousness, which made the Bible what it was to the first Christians. This fixed it in their hearts, entwined it around their first principles of action, and connected it with their habitual language and doctrine. And it is to this we owe, under God, the copious testimonies on which our faith now rests.

Let the detail of these testimonies, then, bring us back to that **SIMPLICITY OF LOVE TO CHRIST** from which they flowed. Let us delight in our Bibles. Let the discovery of our lost estate, and the proffers of exuberant grace in the sacrifice of Christ, which are there made to us, move and bear away our hearts. If, indeed, professed Christians had any just measure of this devout temper, they would not need such courses of Lectures as I am now attempting. The obvious arguments for the authenticity of the sacred scriptures, would so fall in with their conviction of the excellency of the gospel, as at once to kindle admiration, obedience, joy. The scoffs of unbelief would no more affect them now, than the scorn of Celsus or Porphyry did the Christians of earlier days. They would only see, in the bitterness of adversaries, whether ancient or modern, and in the admissions they are compelled to make, further reasons for adoring that mysterious Providence, which, after employing the love of friends, overrules also the wrath of enemies to the establishment of his own word. They would as-

cribe to its true cause—an indifference to holiness and truth—that perverse ingenuity which can overlook the most luminous evidence, to follow some cloudy sophism, and which can adhere, amidst the blaze of evangelical light, to the darkness and uncertainty of human imaginations.

And it is only by imbibing this holy love to Christ, that the evidences now can have their full and proper effect upon the heart. It is then the Christian will stand most firm. Unmoved by the fearful examples of disobedience against conscience which abound, he will be only anxious to love his Bible more, to transcribe it into his heart and life with greater fidelity, and to rise by the means of these proofs of authenticity, to that spiritual elevation of faith and joy in God, and of holy obedience to his will, which it is the end of all external evidences to produce.

## LECTURE VI.

## CREDIBILITY OF THE GOSPEL HISTORY.

## LUKE I. 1—4.

*Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed amongst us; even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word. It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things wherein thou hast been instructed.*

HAVING proved that the books of the New Testament are authentic, the whole question as to the external evidence is virtually settled. In pursuance however of our design, of fixing in the susceptible heart a deeper reverence for Christianity, by tracing out the separate steps of the great argument, I go on to the next question in order, which is—Whether the history contained in the New Testament may be fully credited; that is, whether the sacred writers describe things as they really took place; whether their books deserve to be implicitly trusted, so that a fact ought to be accounted true, because it is found in them?



The question embraces what the critics call, the Credibility of the gospel history.

It is to this that the words of my text immediately apply. St. Luke wrote his narrative to set right, perhaps correct, the accounts given by others—to show on what foundation the “things most surely believed” by the first Christians rested—to do this by an appeal to those who “from the beginning had been eye-witnesses and ministers of the word”—and to do it as one who himself “had a perfect understanding of all things from the very first”—and thus to lay the firmest grounds of credibility, and teach them “the certainty of those things wherein they had been instructed.”

On this question, then, the natural course for us to take, is to ask, in the first place, as we did on a former occasion, How do men act in common life under similar circumstances; in what way do they ascertain the credibility of historical works?

I take up any celebrated writings of this kind:—Davila's History of the Civil Wars of France—Lord Clarendon's History of the Great Rebellion—Father Paul's History of the Council of Trent; and I ask, what are the grounds on which the credibility of such works rest?

Are the books themselves AUTHENTIC? Are the principal facts in them supported by OTHER TESTIMONIES? Do the HISTORIES THEMSELVES, and the CHARACTER OF THE WRITERS, furnish satisfactory proof of trust-worthiness? These are the questions which lead to the natural evidences of the truth and fidelity of a narrative.

In a similar way, then, I proceed as to the credibility of the New Testament books. I leave for the present the divine authority, inspiration, and other most important subsequent considerations. I confine myself to one plain point, Are the Christian writers deserving of entire credit in their narratives?

To prove this, I appeal to the **GENUINENESS AND AUTHENTICITY** of the books, as already established—to all **OTHER ACCESSIBLE SOURCES** of information—to the **CHARACTER AND CIRCUMSTANCES** of the sacred writers themselves.

When I shall have gone through these particulars, a few observations will evince the authenticity and credibility of the books of the Old Testament, and the fidelity of our English authorized Translation, and conclude this first division of our whole course.

I. I appeal to the **AUTHENTICITY OF THE BOOKS** of the New Testament, as involving their credibility.

1. For it is very rare to meet with any authentic works of the historical kind, observes a profound writer,<sup>1</sup> in which the principal facts are untrue. Men who publish grave historical works, openly to the world, before all their countrymen, under their own name, can have no motive, no hope of being read, no possibility of compassing any one end, if they falsify the principal facts of their narrative. I know not that we have a single instance upon record of such an attempt. And much less is this possible, when the history itself is contemporary, and the writers record the facts of their own times, before the face of their own people and nation.

If Davila, or Lord Clarendon, or Father Paul, had falsified the principal facts<sup>2</sup> on which their histories proceed, what would it have availed them? Who would have given the least credit to their books? What would have been the consequences of their dis-

<sup>1</sup> Hartley.

<sup>2</sup> For as to minor questions, errors in judgment, over-statements, and the other ordinary effects of human frailty, I say nothing; these were prevented, in the case of the sacred writers, by the inspiration, by which, as we shall hereafter prove, they were guided.

honesty, but shame and disgrace, without the accomplishment of one single object ?

The attempt to falsify contemporary writings, becomes the more impracticable, in proportion as interest is excited, prejudices are opposed, new modes of thinking and acting are introduced, and established habits broken up.

Then I say, that the gospel history being authentic, is therefore credible ; that is, having been published at the very time, by the Apostles, under their own names as eye-witnesses, before the face of mankind, enemies as well as friends, for the avowed purpose of propagating the Christian religion—is therefore deserving of credit---the main facts of it are true.

2. But, further, if the New Testament be authentic, the very small number of its principal facts, and the extraordinary prominence and importance of those facts, prove the credibility of them.

The Christian books do not treat of any long and difficult and remote scene of history, of a multitude of complicated events involved in secret negotiations and transactions, as all our Histories of England do. But they record a few, a very few principal facts, in a period of time extremely brief ; but these facts, so broad, so notorious, of such prodigious importance, so immediately affecting the business and bosoms of men, that it was utterly impossible that any imposition could be practised.

About six or seven principal events comprehend every thing. The birth of an extraordinary person, whom the apostles call the Son of God—his series of wonderful works wrought before the eyes of mankind—his holy and beneficent life—his violent death by crucifixion—his resurrection—the descent of the Holy Ghost. Upon the footing of these few facts, the apostles go forth to promulgate the Gospel and change the religion of the world ; and whilst thus em-

ployed, publish the account of the several events before the eyes of those who had witnessed them. With such a design, it was morally impossible that the apostles, if they really wrote these histories, (as we have abundantly proved, and as we now consider to be admitted,) could have falsified facts of such prominence, and awakening such intense interest. The authenticity proves the credibility.

3. But, yet more, the positive and varied testimonies which were brought forward to prove that the books of the New Testament were genuine, evince that the chief matters of them are credible. We marshalled those testimonies, indeed, only to support the proposition then before us, the authentic origin of the New Testament; but they were testimonies, in most instances, more properly belonging to the credibility. In truth, the arguments for the genuineness of the sacred writings are so interwoven with those for their trust-worthiness, and they support each other in such a variety of ways, that it is extremely difficult to keep the proper distinction, so as not to anticipate and prove more than the exactness of logical method requires; or, in other words, the inconsistency of the contrary supposition is so great, that you can scarcely imagine it. It cannot stand long enough to be confuted.<sup>3</sup> But it is quite clear that the Christian writers of the early centuries do not appeal to the New Testament, merely as the production of the apostles, but as the undoubted record of the facts of the gospel history. Nor do the Jewish and Heathen opponents argue against the books on any other ground. The question of authorship would have had no interest, except as bringing along with it that of fidelity and

<sup>3</sup> See Dr. Gregory's Letters, vol. i. p. 89, &c. The remark is applicable to the entire argument—all the parts of it hang together. The miracles, more especially, as we shall see in the next Lecture, rest on the general credibility of the books of the New Testament.

truth of history. Indeed, in almost all the testimonies adduced in the last Lecture, we came at the evidence of authenticity through that of credibility. When Justin Martyr, for example, asserts that "the first Christians assembled on the Sunday, that the memoirs of the apostles were read, and that the president afterwards exhorted the people to the imitation of such excellent things:" the passage is manifestly, and in the first instance, a proof of the full credit attached to the facts recorded in the New Testament; though of course that implies the existence of the books which recorded them, and the uncontradicted reception of them as the authentic writings of the apostles. So of all the rest. The quotations are made, not to prove the authenticity, which we gather from them incidentally, as it were; but for the highest and most practical purposes—for exhortation and reproof and consolation, as deducible from the truth of the several facts which they refer to—that is, as resting upon the credibility of the history.

Here, then, we might pause. The authenticity, under the circumstances of the case before us, sufficiently sustains the credibility. The reason why we dwelt so long on that preliminary question, will now be appreciated. It carries every thing with it. Nor can any mere cavil or surmise on minor points, be allowed for a moment, to shake this solid conclusion. We must have strong and decisive testimonies—facts supported by historical documents—ancient and undoubted witnesses more numerous and trust-worthy than those we have adduced, before we can entertain any doubts as to the full confidence due to the gospel history. I need not say, that no such testimonies have ever been produced, or attempted to be produced. Christianity has never yet met with a fair and manly adversary.

I proceed to appeal,

**II. TO ALL OTHER ACCESSIBLE SOURCES OF INFORMATION.** For this is the second way in which we try this question of credibility.

1. The governors of the Roman provinces were accustomed to send to Rome accounts of remarkable transactions, which were preserved as the acts of their respective governments. Pontius Pilate gave an account of the death and resurrection of Christ in his Memoirs of Jewish affairs, called *Acta Pilati*. Eusebius, (A. D. 315,) referring to them, says: "Our Saviour's resurrection being much talked of throughout Palestine, Pilate informed the Emperor of it." To these acts, deposited amongst the archives of the empire, the primitive Christians always appealed in their disputations with the Gentiles, as to most undoubted testimony. Thus, Justin Martyr, in his first Apology, (A. D. 140,) having mentioned the crucifixion of Christ, adds, "And that these things were so done, you may know from the Acts written in the time of Pontius Pilate." Tertullian, in his Apology, (A. D. 198,) says: "Of all these things relating to Christ, Pilate himself, in conscience already a Christian, sent an account to Tiberius, then Emperor." And in another place he appeals to them in this pointed manner: "Search your own commentaries or public writings; at the moment of Christ's death, the light departed from the sun, and the land was darkened at noonday, which wonder is related in your own annals, and is preserved in your archives to this day."<sup>4</sup>

Thus we set out with a record of the chief facts of the New Testament in the public annals of the Roman empire.

2. The testimony of Heathen writers to the authenticity of the New Testament, which we produced in our last discourse, was confined to those whom controversies brought into contact with the Christians,

<sup>4</sup> Apology, c. 21.

Celsus, Porphyry, Julian. These all admit the facts of the gospel history, and argue upon them. But numerous profane authors, likewise, not at all engaged in controversy with Christians, notice the chief events recorded in our books, as the religion spread through the empire. They speak of Christianity itself, indeed, with the ignorance or scorn which might be expected from proud idolaters, who took no interest in the new doctrine; but their testimony to the facts is on this account the more undeniable. I pass over the important testimonies of Suetonius, Martial, Juvenal, *Ælius Lampridius*, Lucian, Epictetus, the Emperor *Marcus Antonius*, and others,<sup>5</sup> in order to appeal to Tacitus and Pliny, the one contemporary with the apostles, the other of the next age.<sup>6</sup>

Tacitus relates, about the thirtieth year after our Lord's resurrection, "that the city of Rome being burnt, the Emperor Nero, to avert the infamy of being accounted the author of that calamity, threw the odium of it on the Christians, who had their name from Christ, who suffered death in the reign of Tiberius, under his Procurator, Pontius Pilate." Here is a distinct reference to the facts of the gospel history in the annals of this celebrated historian, who so little favoured Christianity, that he called it "*exitiabilis superstitio*,"—a destructive superstition—and whose testimony, even Gibbon admits as incontrovertible.

Pliny's letter to the Emperor Trajan, in the succeeding century, (A. D. 170,) confirms the gospel narrative. He testifies that "the Christians filled his government of Bithynia; that the heathen temples and worship had been forsaken; that they met on a certain day to sing hymns to Christ as to a God; and that their lives were innocent and pure." "Compar-

<sup>5</sup> See Lardner in loc.

<sup>6</sup> We shall have again to refer to this testimony more at length, when we come to the subject of the propagation of Christianity.

ing Pliny's letter with the account in the Acts," says a French writer, "it seems to me that I had not taken up another author, but that I was still reading the historian of that extraordinary society."<sup>7</sup>

Such testimonies stamp a credibility, not only upon particular facts on which they chance to fall, but upon the entire narrative to which such accredited facts belong.

3. But we have, in the next place, by the goodness of Providence, the testimony of a Jewish historian, Josephus, to our sacred narrative. He lived and died a Jew. He was born A. D. 37. He wrote his History of the Jewish Wars, A. D. 75; and in A. D. 93, his Jewish Antiquities. His talents and opportunities for information are undeniable. His writings confirm, in almost innumerable instances, the credibility of the New Testament. His account of the state of affairs in Judæa, of the Jewish sects and principles, of the Samaritans, of Herod and his sons, and of the manners of the Jewish people, entirely agree with the evangelical history, and frequently illustrate matters which it did not fall in with the design of our sacred books to detail.

1. I present, first, an example of facts, noticed by the Jewish historian, which our gospel account HAD PASSED OVER; probably because they belonged to secular history. We read in St. Matthew, that on the death of Herod, Joseph "arose and took the young child and his mother and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judæa, in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither." The particular cause of this sudden fear we learn not from the Evangelist. But Josephus informs us, that the first act of Archelaus was the cruel murder of three thousand Jews at the festival of the Passover—an outrageous instance of barbarity, which would be instantly carried by the

<sup>7</sup> Bonnet in Paley.



Jews, on their return to their respective cities, to every part of Judæa, and which accounts most naturally for the suspension of the sacred journey.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> I give the very acute and conclusive account of Mr. Blunt:—"Archelaus, therefore, must have been notorious for his cruelty (it should seem) *very soon indeed after his coming to the throne*. Nothing short of this could account for the sudden resolution of Joseph to avoid him with so much speed.

"Now, it is remarkable enough, that at the very Passover after Herod's death, even before Archelaus had got time to set out for Rome, to obtain the ratification of his authority from the Emperor, he was guilty of an act of outrage and bloodshed, under circumstances, above all others, fitted to make it generally and immediately known. One of the last deeds of his father Herod had been to put to death Judas and Matthias, two persons who had instigated some young men to pull down a golden eagle which Herod had fixed over the gate of the temple, contrary, as they conceived, to the law of Moses. The hapless fate of these martyrs to the law, excited great commiseration at the Passover which ensued. The parties, however, who uttered their lamentations aloud, were silenced by Archelaus, the new king, in the following manner:—

"He sent out all the troops against them, and ordered the horsemen to prevent those who had their tents outside the temple, from rendering assistance to those who were within it, and to put to death such as might escape from the foot. *Three thousand men did these cavalry slay*; the rest betook themselves for safety to the neighbouring mountains. Then Archelaus commanded proclamation to be made, that they should all retire to their own homes. So they went away, and *left the festival, for fear lest somewhat worse should ensue*." Antiq. b. xvii. c. 2. s. 3.

"We must bear in mind, that at the Passover, Jews from all parts of the world were assembled; so that any event which occurred at Jerusalem, during that great feast, would be speedily reported, on their return, to the countries where they dwelt. Such a massacre, therefore, at such a season, would at once stamp the character of Archelaus. The fear of him would naturally enough spread wherever a Jew was to be found; and, in fact, so well remembered was this, his first essay at governing the people, that several years afterwards it was brought against him with great effect, on his appearance before Cæsar at Rome.

"It is the more probable, that this act of cruelty inspired Joseph with his dread of Archelaus, because that prince could

Let me, in the next place, give a specimen of ONCURRENT NARRATIVE of Josephus. In the account of the death of Herod, in the twelfth of the book, we have various remarkable particulars; but more than Josephus also actually details in his narrative—the assembly, the oration, the idol's cry of the people, Herod's sudden death. Especially the royal apparel in which he was arrayed, is said by the Jewish historian to have been a robe of silver, on which the rays of the sun falling, gave him a majestic and awful appearance—a circumstance which but too naturally accounts for the impious acclamations of the people.<sup>9</sup>

He had been much known before he came to the throne; having had any public employment, or, indeed, future reputation, like his half-brother, Antipater, whereby he might have discovered himself to the nation at large."—*Veracity of Josephus*, p. 135—9.

The sacred historian states, *Herod went down from Jerusalem to Cæsarea, and there sat upon a set day, Herod arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an answer to them; and the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a God, and not of a man. And immediately the Angel of the Lord smote him, because he had not given God the glory, and he was eaten of worms, and he spake the ghost.* Acts xii. 3.

Josephus relates, that having now reigned three years over all Judæa, he went to the city of Cæsarea. That he celebrated shows in honour of Cæsar—that he came into the theatre dressed in a robe of silver, of most curious workmanship; that the rays of the rising sun, reflected from so splendid a garb, gave him a majestic and awful appearance; and that in a short time the people began in several parts of the theatre flattering acclamations, calling him a god, and entreating him to be propitious to them. That the king neither reprov'd these persons, nor rejected the impious flattery; that im-

iii. But the account which Josephus gives of John Baptist, is yet more important, BOTH BY WHAT HE SAYS, AND BY WHAT HE CONCEALS. "Some of the Jews were of opinion that God had suffered Herod's army to be destroyed, as a just punishment on him for the death of John, called the Baptist. For Herod had killed him, who was a just man, and who had called upon the Jews to be baptized, and to practise virtue. And many coming to him, (for they were wonderfully taken with his discourses,) Herod was seized with apprehensions, lest by his authority they should be led into sedition against him. Being taken up on this suspicion of Herod, and being sent bound to the castle of Machærus, he was slain there."

This passage admits and verifies all the principal facts concerning John Baptist, as contained in our books. Nor does the omission of a reference to John Baptist's doctrine, and of his being the forerunner of the Messiah, less clearly establish, though tacitly, the other parts of our gospel account. Indeed, the SILENCE of this great historian in his other writings, where he was almost compelled to speak, on the particulars of our Lord's life and crucifixion and the establishment of Christianity, whilst he details the most minute circumstances of the very times when they occurred, remarkably confirms the truth of our Christian history. For that Josephus was acquainted with the chief events, his notice of John Baptist shows, and the records of the contemporary historian Tacitus, would have compelled him to know. Had the apostles then been practising any imposition upon

mediately after this, he was seized with pains in the bowels, extremely violent, was carried in all haste to his palace, and expired in torment in five days. Ant. l. 19, c. 8, s. 2, apud Lardner.

mankind, had they proclaimed things which had not really taken place, he would have rejoiced to expose the deception. That he has not done so, can only be accounted for by the truth of the facts. The historian, a Jew, a contemporary, writing the narrative of the time, who had the fullest opportunity of knowledge, and whose bitterness to the Christian name doubtless resembled that of his countrymen, brings no charge of imposition or fraud, gives no account of things different from our own, holds his peace—surely the silence of such an individual proclaims aloud the fidelity of our history; whilst every word of his testimony, where he does speak, goes to confirm positively and decisively that fidelity.<sup>10</sup>

I need not dwell on the important testimony to be derived from the Mishna, a collection of Jewish Traditions, published about A. D. 180; and from the Talmuds, or Comments on those Traditions, which appeared about the years A. D. 300 and A. D. 500; and which, amidst much absurdity and keen

<sup>10</sup> I waive the disputed passage, where he notices briefly our Lord, and allows him to be the Messiah: though the judgment of the best critics is in its favour.

I cannot but add, however, the following reflection of the writer just referred to, upon the history of Josephus, *when taken together and as a whole*, in convincing us of the truth of the gospel history. “No man, (says our author,) I think, can rise from a perusal of the latter books of the Antiquities, and the account of the Jewish War, without a very strong impression that the state of Judæa, civil, political, and moral, as far as it can be gathered from the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles, is portrayed in these latter (the Gospels and Acts) with the greatest accuracy, and with the strictest attention to all the circumstances of the place and the times. It is impossible to impart this conviction to my readers in a paragraph; the nature of the case does not admit of it; it is the result of a thousand little facts, which it would be difficult to detach from the general narrative, and which, considered separately, might seem frivolous and fanciful.” Blunt’s Veracity, p. 120.

contempt, admit all the facts of the Christian history.

4. I must not however omit that proof of the credibility which arises from the character of many of the converts to the Christian faith, who examined anxiously its pretensions, met its claims at first with prejudice and hatred, and yet ended in yielding to the undoubted facts and the holy doctrines derived from them. I enter not now on the subject of the propagation of the gospel; I merely say, that men of the finest talents—philosophers, orators, grammarians, rhetoricians, lawyers—persons of every rank and station in society, from the humble slave to the attendants on the imperial court, examined the facts of our history, and yielded to the force of conviction, and persevered in acting on that conviction, in spite of strong previous prejudice, and subsequent opposition, ridicule, persecution, and death—and I affirm, that the credit which they gave to these facts, and which was the ground of their conversion then, is a strong confirmation of our faith in them now.

5. Nor can I pass unnoticed the circumstance, that the impostor Mahomet, who professed to deliver a new revelation, (A. D. 612,) and who was filled with the bitterest hatred of Christianity, ventured not to question the facts on which it rests. He speaks of John Baptist and our Lord by name, mentions our Lord's miraculous works, his ascension, his apostles, and the unbelief of the Jews. Can concurring testimonies be pushed further?

6. I appeal, again, to the religious rites and usages springing out of the facts of Christianity, as recorded in the New Testament, and which have subsisted from that time to the present among all the nations of Christendom. I dwell not on them in this place, as they will be stated more largely in the following

lecture,<sup>11</sup> but the argument of the credibility demands of us the recollection that Baptism, the Lord's Supper, religious assemblies, charitable contributions for the poor, the celebration of the first day in the week, in remembrance of our Lord's resurrection, are memorials of the facts of Christianity, and arose from them.

7. I add only, that several ancient and authentic monuments of the events recorded in the gospels, have survived the wrecks of time, and attest the credibility of our history. Amongst the most striking and important proofs of early history, are coins, medals, inscriptions, marbles, struck or formed at the time, or soon after the time of the respective events, and extant still for the examination of mankind. Authentic testimonies of this nature are sought for with eagerness by antiquaries, and are allowed to have the greatest weight in all historical inquiries. Medals are struck to commemorate great events. Inscriptions record facts. Now, it is the glory of Christianity, that during eighteen centuries every genuine relic of antiquity has confirmed the facts of her history. Take one or two examples: St. Luke terms Philippi a colony, using a word which implies that it was a latin colony;<sup>12</sup> but as this betokens a favour which such a city had little reason to expect, critics were embarrassed to account for the title, till some coins were brought to light, which expressly mention, that Julius Cæsar himself had bestowed the dignity on it. Thus, though no author extant, but St. Luke, has mentioned it under that character, these coins corroborate the fidelity of the sacred writer.

Again, the town-clerk of Ephesus, (states our sacred author, Acts xix.) in order to quell a tumult, thus addressed the Ephesians: "What man is there

<sup>11</sup> Lect. vii.

<sup>12</sup> Acts xvi. 11, 12. "We came to Philippi—a colony"—*κολωνια*—originally a latin word, *colonia*. See Calmet, Frag. i. p. 53—6.

that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a **WORSHIPPER** of the great goddess **Diana**?" The original word is **ΝΕΩΚΟΠΟΝ**, literally, temple-sweeper, equivalent to our church-warden, an appellation taken by cities which were dedicated to the service of some god or goddess. Now there are medals still extant, on which the front of the temple of **Diana** is exhibited. In the centre is an image of the goddess; and around the side and bottom is an inscription, in which the Ephesians are called by this very term **ΝΕΩΚΟΠΟΙ**. Besides the testimony furnished by this medal, there is now extant at Ephesus an ancient Greek inscription, which not only confirms the general history related in Acts xix. but even approaches to several sentiments and phrases which occur in that chapter. These coincidences are so striking and conclusive, that they are sufficient of themselves to establish the credibility of the work in which they are found.<sup>13</sup>

It is in this way that circumstances of our gospel narratives have been explained, difficulties removed, titles of governors vindicated, names of places illustrated, the whole series of the facts of Christianity established beyond all reasonable doubt.

What accessible sources, then, have not confirmed, and do not confirm, the credibility of the gospel history? Where can we look for testimonies of ancient events, which are not included in those we have cited? What history is true, if ours be false? Can any thing human be more certain, than the fidelity of the New Testament? Can the exuberance of the divine goodness itself be asked to provide further arguments for those who can harden their hearts against the force of these?

But I shall be reminded that an appeal was made to a third class of proofs of the credit due to the evangelical records.


<sup>13</sup> T. H. Horne, i. 242.

### III. THE CHARACTER AND CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE SACRED WRITERS THEMSELVES.

For we judge in all other cases of the weight of testimony, by considering the character and circumstances of those who depose it. We examine the testimony itself; we inquire whether the natural and unerring signs of veracity are apparent in it; whether there is that honesty and consistency in the different parts of the account which are the sure marks of truth. We next examine the character and circumstances of those who give the testimony, whether they were in a situation to know the real truth, whether their moral and religious conduct gives a pledge of sincerity, whether their temporal interests, previous prejudices and habits, and subsequent conduct, throw any light upon their governing motive.

If there are more witnesses than one, we inquire into their number, the agreement or otherwise of their accounts, their conduct towards each other and before the face of the world.

Upon principles like these human life is governed. We act continually, in the most important concerns, and in every department of human knowledge, upon testimony. The word of one man whom we know to be of unimpeachable sincerity, determines us every day. But if two persons of undeniable veracity, who have no apparent motive to deceive us, and who are evidently seeking our welfare, bear witness to a plain fact occurring under their own knowledge, we consider it a most reasonable ground of confidence. Testimony may indeed deceive, that is, some testimony under some circumstances may deceive—but the infinitely larger portion of all testimony is true; and it is upon the footing of that immense majority of true cases, that the few—the comparatively few—false ones obtain credit. Indeed, the solemn declaration of two or more individuals of character as to facts of which they are competent judges, persevered





in under every suffering, sustained by unvaried consistency, and accompanied by a pure, beneficent, and holy life, never yet deceived—no case was ever produced in which such testimony was untrue.<sup>14</sup>

Let us apply these remarks to the sacred writers. We have appealed to the authenticity of their books, and to all other accessible sources of information. These prove the credibility of the principal facts of their writings. Let us appeal now to themselves, in order to see whether we may repose that implicit confidence in them, as to be able to rely also upon the **WHOLE OF THEIR STATEMENTS IN EVERY PARTICULAR**; in other words, whether the external testimony adduced to the chief facts, is supported by the number, character, circumstances, and manner of writing and acting of the witnesses themselves, so as to prove **ALL THEIR FACTS AND STATEMENTS** to be credible.

1. We have here *twelve separate witnesses* of the specific facts of the gospel history—to whom three more (St. Mark, St. Luke, and St. Paul) may be added. Of these fifteen witnesses, eight composed writings, in twenty-seven several works, published within a few years of the events which they record; and works read and examined by their contemporaries, both friends and foes, in every part of the known world. Such is the number of agreeing witnesses to every one of the facts, all harmonizing in their testimony to them, and especially to the fact of the resurrection of their Lord.

2. These persons had *a full knowledge* of the things they attested. They were eye-witnesses, or the companions of those who were. Of the four evangelists, one probably wrote his account within six or eight years of the crucifixion; (A. D. 38 or 40;) a second, following his steps, but publishing his his-

<sup>14</sup> Paley.

tory at a distance and under the eye of St. Peter,<sup>15</sup> came about A. D. 61, at an interval of twenty or thirty years. The evangelist St. Luke, from whom my text is taken, appeared soon after (A. D. 63) to set in order "the things then most surely believed"—to gather them from those "who had been eye-witnesses from the beginning;" and, having a "perfect understanding of all things from the very first," to afford a "certainty" to Christians of the "things in which they had been instructed." After an interval again of about thirty years, (A. D. 97,) the last surviving apostle completes the sacred story.

In the meantime, the history of the first propagation of the gospel is given by St. Luke, a companion of one of the greatest of the apostles, and numerous epistles are addressed to the infant churches. If any witnesses, then, were ever fully acquainted with what they relate, they are these.

3. The testimony which they bear, is to facts of *which they were perfectly competent to judge*—the life, discourses, miracles, and resurrection of their Master—events which passed before their eyes, and were the objects of their continual and most familiar observation. If Plato is deemed a competent witness of the events of the life of Socrates, his master; or any modern biographer of the actions of an illustrious person with whom he has constantly conversed—Boswell, for instance, of his friend, the great moralist, Johnson—then surely the evangelists are competent witnesses of the life of Christ.

It is an extraordinary, but singular fact, that no history since the commencement of the world, has been written by so great a number of the friends and companions of an illustrious person as that of our

<sup>15</sup> So Papias, Clemens Alexandrinus, Caius, Eusebius, &c. testify.—See p. 112, *supra*.

Lord.<sup>16</sup> One contemporary history is a rarity—two is a coincidence scarcely known—four is, so far as appears, unparalleled.

4. These witnesses were persons of *transparent integrity of character*: whether you regard the apostles generally, or the eight writers of the New Testament, or merely the four evangelists; simplicity, honesty, good faith, are apparent in all they say and do and write. The style and manner of their books have been mentioned. But it is peculiarly appropriate to this place to notice the inimitable artlessness and impartiality which are on the very face of all their testimony. It never enters into their minds to consider how this or the other action may affect their own reputation or appear to mankind. They lay the facts before the world. If the reader will not credit their testimony, there is no help for it; they tell the truth, the whole truth, just as it happened, and nothing else.<sup>16</sup> Who can avoid noticing, for example, the honesty with which they record their own failings, the dulness of their apprehension, their unbelief, their pride, their emulations, their disputes, the rebukes they brought upon themselves, their disgraceful flight and cowardice, the treachery of one of their number, and the denial of his Master by another?<sup>17</sup> Most of them, moreover, were plain, illiterate men, no way qualified by education or habit for attempting an imposture. Their accounts apparently vary from each other in a thousand respects, as we before observed; but their witness to the broad facts of their Master's life is decided, uniform, conclusive.<sup>18</sup> The undesigned coincidences, which we

<sup>16</sup> T. H. Horne.

<sup>17</sup> The aggravated circumstance of the cock crowing twice, as recorded in the gospel, written under the eye of the penitent apostle, is deserving of remark. See Mark xiv. 66—71.

<sup>18</sup> The fine remark of Sir Isaac Newton on the traces of local memory in St. Matthew is well known.

have also referred to, between the gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, and the epistles, confirm the credibility of them all.<sup>19</sup> The letters to Timothy, Titus, Philemon, confidential, individual friends, contain no other facts than those to the churches of Ephesus, or to the Christian converts scattered over the whole of Asia.<sup>20</sup> The epistles, which abound with rebukes, appeal as boldly to the same facts, as those which contain commendation.

5. The apostles again were *men of sound minds, and by no means credulous or rash*. The prominent facts they relate required nothing more than that the witnesses' minds should be sane and honestly used. And where is any vestige in their accounts, of credulity or enthusiasm? Were ever men more calm, deliberative, aware of all they were about, free from any trait of undue excitation of mind? I appeal to their writings. I appeal to every step of their conduct. So far were they from being credulous, that they were reluctant, slow, backward to believe the truth of any thing at all extraordinary. The approach of their Master on the sea, they credited not till he assured them it was himself. At his apprehension by the band of soldiers, they were astonished and fled. His resurrection they could scarcely be induced to believe. And as to enthusiasm, where are narratives so stamped with the character of self-possession, soberness, impartiality? There is not a note of exclamation throughout the history. And what can be more consistent, luminous, unadorned, straightforward, than their whole account?

6. Then, they relate events *at the spot where they*

<sup>19</sup> "He who is telling the truth, is apt to state his facts and leave them to their fate; he speaks as one having authority, and cares not about the why or the wherefore, because it never occurs to him that such particulars are wanted to make his statements credible."—*Blunt*, 27.

<sup>20</sup> 1 Peter i. 1.

*occurred, and before the multitudes who witnessed them.* The gospel narrative does not detail facts which happened in another part of the world, or in the recesses of a wilderness, or concerning a person unknown. They relate at Jerusalem what they assert occurred at Jerusalem. They relate events the most public, occurring to a person whose fame filled the whole country, and involving a charge against their own rulers; these events they relate in the presence of the very multitudes before whose eyes they took place, in the face of enemies the most implacable, and before the tribunals of justice—and they relate them, on various occasions, with the same undaunted boldness.

7. The purity and beneficence of their characters I have noticed, so far as regards freedom from credulousness and rashness. But the *unparalleled benevolence and holiness of their whole subsequent lives*, their freedom from ambition and covetousness, their self-denying love to mankind, and even to their enemies, their meekness and patience under injuries, their heroic fortitude, their discretion and prudence—all the virtues of a devout, laborious, humane life, taken up in consequence of their belief in the Christian history, proves the credit due to the facts of it. For good men are as consistent in virtue, as bad men in vice. The same base hypocrisy which would lead men to forge a false account and establish a lie; would infallibly appear also in their pride, covetousness, ambition, sensuality, love of domination—selfishness in one form or other. This is the brand which Providence puts upon imposture. Unblemished innocency is the seal of truth. This stamps our divine books. It is morally impossible that such men could have imposed knowingly and basely upon mankind.

Lastly, They had nothing *to expect for their testimony but temporal calamities and death*; which they actually incurred, and incurred without once

shrinking from the facts they asserted. What was there to instigate the apostles to falsify the truth? What had they to look for? A miserable life, reproach, contempt, derision; the loss of property, home, country; the being "made as the filth of the earth, and the offscouring of all things;" till a shameful and lingering execution delivered them up to posthumous ignominy and scorn. That men of such holy characters should, in the face of such sufferings, persevere unto death in their testimony to certain broad and intelligible facts, before an enraged world---when they had only to hold their peace, and abstain from bearing their testimony, in order to enjoy tranquillity like other men---can only be accounted for on one supposition, the truth of what they asserted.<sup>21</sup>

In short, this branch of our argument may be summed up in the nervous lines of one of our greatest poets:<sup>22</sup>

Whence, but from heaven, could men unskilled in arts,  
In several ages born, in several parts,  
Weave such agreeing truths? Or how or why  
Should all conspire to cheat us with a lie?  
Unasked their pains, ungrateful their advice;  
Starving their gain, and martyrdom their price?

Two considerations of some additional weight strengthen all these proofs of the credibility.

Not one of the apostles or of their numerous converts ever came forward *to complain of any imposition* having been practised upon them. Now it is the obvious dictate of common sense, that if our history be a forgery, and the events did not really take place, some one, out of the many thousands and tens of thousands who followed the religion, under some circumstances or other, must have exposed the deceit, and have totally discomfited the enterprise. But where is the individual? Who has charged our books with false-

<sup>21</sup> Paley.

<sup>22</sup> Dryden.

hood? Did Judas, who, stung with remorse, threw back his guilty gain, and declared he had betrayed the innocent blood? Or did the apostate of a later age, Julian, who admits every one of the gospel facts? Our religion stands without an accuser.

Again, if our accounts are false, *where is the true one?* Our narrative gives an account, a natural, an adequate, and nothing more than an adequate, account of the facts. And where are the traces, where the vestiges of any other? What is the opposite statement? What the counter-hypothesis, that we may decide between them? All is silent as death. Every whisper of past tradition confirms our narrative. All accessible information falls in with it. Our account, therefore, is true. Nothing but a perverseness of mind, hardened against the force of moral evidence, can withhold us from reposing an entire confidence, a full acquiescence of the whole rational faculties of man, on the veracity of the evangelical history.

This would be the place for entering upon the authenticity and credibility of the Old Testament, in order that this branch of our whole subject being completed, we might pass on to the divine authority of the Christian revelation. But this point is so involved in the truth of the New Testament, and so immediately follows from it, that I shall confine myself to an observation or two upon the connexion.

For it is impossible to open the New Testament without perceiving that the Christian religion is the accomplishment of the Jewish, that our Lord and his apostles constantly appealed to the books of the Old Testament as acknowledged scriptures, quoted them as of unquestionable authority, and publicly professed to accomplish the prophecies which they contain. If, therefore, the New Testament be genuine and credible, the Old Testament is so likewise. The two are indissolubly linked together. The moment you open

St. Matthew, the genealogy brings in an appeal to the whole history of the Old Testament; and the distinct references to Isaiah and Jeremiah and Micah, as well-authenticated prophets, whose predictions were to be accomplished in the Messiah, seal the truth of the Old Testament, if that of the New is admitted. In like manner our Lord appeals in his instructions, to these writings as a well-known volume of authentic records, "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me." He recognizes also the three divisions of the sacred books, "All things must be fulfilled which are written in the law of Moses and the Psalms and the prophets concerning me."

The history of the chief persons of the Old Testament is distinctly confirmed by St. Stephen, in his address to the council,<sup>23</sup> and by the sacred author of the Epistle to the Hebrews.<sup>24</sup> These contain summaries of the Jewish history agreeing in every part with the Old Testament records.

About one hundred and forty times do the solemn expressions, "Scriptures," "Holy Scriptures," "Scriptures of the Prophets," "It is written," occur in the New Testament, in attestation of the Old.

But I need not dwell on so plain a point, and one so universally admitted. I will content myself with appealing to St. Peter for the authority of the whole compass of the prophetic parts of the Old Testament:—"The prophecy came not of old time by the will of men; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." And to St. Paul for the truth of the ancient scriptures generally,—“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Acts vii.

<sup>24</sup> chapter xi.

<sup>25</sup> Some notice may, perhaps, be required as to the Apocryphal Books of the Old Testament, after what we stated as to



With regard to the fidelity of our English translation, it will be sufficient to say that the singular care

those of the New. The Apocryphal Books, then, of the Old Testament, differ from those of the New in several respects.—

1. They were admitted into the sacred canon by the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century, and declared to be scripture.—2. They are intermingled with the canonical books both in the Septuagint and in the Roman Catholic editions of the Old Testament.—3. The Protestant Reformed churches, though they deny their inspiration and divine authority, yet read them, or parts of them, (as St. Jerome expresses it,) for “example of life and instruction of manners.”—4. Though devoid of divine authority, they are highly valuable as ancient writings, which throw light upon the phraseology of scripture, and upon the manners of the east; and which contain much important historical matter, and many sublime, moral and religious sentiments. Whereas the Apocryphal Books of the New Testament were—1. Never admitted into the canon even by the Church of Rome;—2. They were never allowed to be read either in that or in the Protestant churches;—3. Nor do they contain any really valuable matter, either historical or moral.

The Apocryphal Books of the Old Testament, however, though thus superior to those of the New, are yet unanimously rejected by Protestants from the sacred canon, for the following reasons:

1. They were never received into the sacred canon by the Jewish church.—2. Not one of the writers in direct terms lays a claim to inspiration.—3. None of them is extant in Hebrew.—4. They were chiefly written by Alexandrian Jews subsequently to the cessation of the prophetic spirit at the time of Malachi.—5. No part of them is sanctioned by our Saviour or the apostles, or referred to by them.—6. They were not admitted into the canon of scripture by the Christian church during the four first centuries.—7. When they were allowed to be read in the fifth century, it was with an express mark of degradation, to distinguish them from the inspired books.

After this conclusive testimony of the whole church of God, Jewish and Christian, against them, it is not necessary to detail the internal marks of non-authenticity, and non-credibility. We will only observe that they state many things which are fabulous, contradictory, and directly at variance with the canonical scriptures. And that they contain many passages

with which it was executed by forty-seven of the most able and learned divines, who had the advantage of consulting all the previous English versions, and who performed it under the eyes of all the scholars of every religious party in Christendom, give us the most just grounds of confidence. Moreover, for above two hundred years it has received the attestations of all competent judges. The language of the learned and pious Dr. Doddridge, himself a dissenter from our national church, and therefore not biassed in favour of our version, (to say nothing of his judgment, candour, and high moral integrity,) may well satisfy us on this point. "I now solemnly tell you, that on a diligent comparison of our translation with the original, we find that of the New Testament, and I might also say that of the Old, in the main faithful and judicious. You know, indeed, that we do not scruple on some occasions to animadvert upon it; but you also know that these remarks affect not the fundamentals of religion, and seldom reach any farther than the beauty of a figure, or at most, the connexion of an argument. Nay, I can confidently say, that to the best of my knowledge and remembrance, as there is no copy of the Greek, so neither is there any translation of the New Testament, which I have seen, from which all the principal facts and doctrines of Christianity might not be learned, so far as the knowledge of them is necessary to salvation, or even to some considerable degree of edification in piety. Nor do I except from this remark even that most erroneous and corrupt version published by the English Jesuits at

which are in themselves false, absurd, and incredible; which are so inconsistent with the relations of all profane historians, that they cannot be admitted without much stronger evidence than belongs to these books.\*

\* T. H. Horne, vol. i. 706, &c.

Rheims, (A.D. 1582,) which is undoubtedly one of the worst that ever appeared in our language.”<sup>25</sup>

Thus far then have we proceeded in our view of the Evidences of Christianity. We have shown the Authenticity and Credibility of the Holy Bible; that is, that the sacred books of it were really written by the authors whose names they bear, and contain a true and faithful history of facts as they occurred.

Here let us pause and ask ourselves whether, so far as we have gone, OUR FAITH PRACTICALLY CORRESPONDS with what we have admitted in argument. You have “been instructed” from your infancy in the things which “are most surely believed amongst us,” as those were to whom St. Luke, in the text, addressed his gospel. The authenticity and credibility of these books, and of the matters they contain, have been laid before you, that you may know the “certainty” of the divine facts as they were delivered by those “who were from the beginning eye-witnesses and ministers of the word.” Does then your personal and practical persuasion of the truth of all you read in the Holy Scriptures, answer to the means of certainty thus afforded you?

You receive daily the witness of men; does the witness of God weigh proportionably on your minds? It might have pleased God that all the external proofs of the authenticity and credibility of his word should have been swept away by the besom of time, and that we should have been left to the proofs deducible from the books themselves, and their effects upon mankind. Does the exuberance of the divine goodness in the preservation of evidences from all imaginable sources of testimony, excite your gratitude, overcome your scruples, augment faith, quicken love, promote obedience?

<sup>25</sup> Dodd. Evidences.

If we repose and act in human affairs daily on every degree of probability, even the lowest; do we act on the strong probability, or rather, the unanswerable moral certainty, which sheds its glory on the book of God?

Alas! how weak is the faith of multitudes, how infirm and uncertain their judgments, how inconsistent and indecisive their conduct! How little are they governed by the weight of testimony in religion! Unless there be a right state of heart, how small is the deference which men practically pay to the Evidences of Christianity! It is for this reason that I insist so continually on the importance of a religious and candid temper. Men believe according to the state of their affections. How little do multitudes act as if a Saviour had been really born, as if he had truly died for our redemption, as if he had really sent down his Holy Spirit upon his church, and was about to return to judge the world! How little do men act upon the "life and immortality which are brought to light by the gospel!" They hesitate—they are negligent—they just admit the authenticity and credibility of the gospel—they are just not unbelievers—but they want feeling, interest, a sense of the importance of religion.

II. Let such, then, awake to the IMMENSE VALUE OF CHRISTIANITY, the facts of which repose on such foundations of evidence. Let every proof of a genuine and credible history, lead them to a deeper persuasion of their own concern in the events, and their own obligation to obey the doctrines, thus attested. Let them not believe the Bible, as they do the history of civil and national transactions, which pretend not to affect the heart nor change the conduct. But let the credibility of the gospel sink deeply into the soul, affect the practical judgment, overcome the power of temptation, vanquish the resistance of the world, con-

quer every lust, and bring the whole man "into captivity to the obedience of Christ."

To admit speculatively, coldly, the authenticity and credibility of the gospel, is little—I want your hearts—the penitence and faith which the gospel demands—the subjection of a ruined and fallen creature to the yoke of the Son of God.

It is in this docile and practical temper of mind that the Evidences of Christianity are to be studied. On the mere scholar, the mere "disputer of this world," truth falls weak and inefficacious, even if it be theoretically admitted. The humble and practical student alone pleases God, and understands fully the force of the divine argument. He may not be able to reason with the gainsayer. He may not be skilled in human learning. He may not be competent to follow me in all the external testimonies which I have been detailing in the present and the former lectures. He may not be accustomed to weigh conflicting testimonies. But he feels the value of the scriptures. He understands the practical part of the testimonies drawn from its style, its contents, and the character and circumstances of the apostles. Such a man knows the use and worth of the Bible, as the mariner knows the use and worth of the compass. A mariner, if illiterate, has neither opportunity nor learning enough to inquire why his needle takes a polar direction, or what the scientific have to say upon its variations in different parts of the globe—he knows nothing of the laws of magnetism, or the dependence of them on electricity—when or by whom they were laid down, and who adapted the compass to the purposes of navigation. But he knows, unlearned as he is, that it is by this needle only that he can find his way through a trackless deep; he knows that by this alone he can escape the dangers of his voyage, and proceed safely to his destined haven; he knows that this only will bring him to his home, his family, his friends.

In like manner the humble Christian feels the value of the scriptures; he feels that they are the only guide through a trackless ocean; that they are the only means of safety in his perilous voyage; that if he would escape the "making shipwreck of faith and a good conscience," and would avoid the rocks and quicksands on which thousands, trusting madly to their own guidance, and neglecting the heavenly direction, perish, he must follow his inspired guide---his sacred compass. He does so; and passing "safely through the troublesome waves of this present world," he arrives, at length, at his destined haven, where are his family, his friends, his Saviour, his eternal rest, his end, his ALL.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Cecil's Remains.

## LECTURE VII.

DIVINE AUTHORITY OF CHRISTIANITY.  
MIRACLES.

## MARK II. 10—12.

*But that ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house. And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion.*

THE arguments in our former Lectures have been directed to prove the authenticity and credibility of the books of the New Testament. In order to ascertain these points, we have examined them by the strictest rules of historical testimony, and we have found them to be established by far stronger proofs than men uniformly consider as satisfactory on similar subjects.

During this inquiry, we have deferred the consi-

deration of the divine authority of the religion of which they treat. It is, however, time to enter upon this topic.

We now open the sacred books with the fullest confidence and repose of mind, as having been really written by the persons whose names they bear, and as entitled, beyond all other writings, to credit, upon the ground of veracity and trust-worthiness.

On reading them with attention, we learn that their chief design is to communicate a revelation from Almighty God to man. This is their main scope, to which all other matters are subordinate. Such being the case, we proceed to examine, with seriousness and humility of mind, the marks and evidences by which we are assured that they really contain a revelation of the divine will.

These credentials we soon discover, were, in the first instance, the miracles which our Lord performed, and the prophecies which were accomplished in him.

These credentials remain in substance the same in every age. They have, however, been enlarged by the lapse of time. To the miracles of our Lord are now added those of the apostles. And to the prophecies accomplished in himself, all the series of predictions which have been since fulfilled, and are now fulfilling, in the world. We now also adjoin the proofs arising from the propagation of the gospel, and the obvious benefits it has conferred on mankind. These topics will form the subject of the present and the four succeeding Lectures.<sup>1</sup>

Our Lord's doctrines and character, as well as the divine effects of his religion, will form branches of the internal evidences to be considered in a further division of our Course.<sup>2</sup>

Thus we shall come to the grounds of a divine faith, arising from a divine testimony. The authen-

<sup>1</sup> Lectures viii.—xi.

<sup>2</sup> Lectures xiv.—xviii.



ticity and credibility of our books place them on the footing of other undoubted histories; the supernatural credentials will give to the subject matter of them a divine authority.

We begin with the **MIRACLES** of our Lord and his apostles.

What, then, is a miracle? It is a visible suspension of those laws of nature, on the general constancy of which the order and preservation of the whole universe rest. These laws God alone, as the author of nature, fixed: and these laws God alone, as the governor and preserver of nature, can alter or suspend. A miracle supposes an established and generally unaltered course of things. Effects that are produced in the regular order of that course we call natural; and those which clearly and palpably depart from that order we call miraculous. Both are equally easy to God; and equally incomprehensible, in the mode of them, to us. That grains of corn sown in the earth should turn into abundant harvests, which nourish whole nations, is an astonishing act of that goodness which continually supplies our wants. But it is constantly exerted; it is common, and therefore excites no extraordinary notice. That five barley loaves and a few small fishes should be multiplied instantaneously, so as to feed five thousand men, and that twelve baskets of fragments should be collected from them, is an astonishing act also. But it is rare and unexpected. It strikes us with surprise. It excites inquiry into the cause of the occurrence. It is, therefore, an act of God, fit to confirm a revelation to mankind. The usual deeds of God's power prove his being and providence; the unusual and miraculous prove the divine commission of the person at whose word they are performed. The extraordinary phenomena which we call miracles, awaken, therefore, from their infrequency, the attention of mankind; and afford, by their evident connexion with supernatural

agency, the best conceivable proof of an immediate indication of the divine will.

Now the question is, Did these facts take place? For instance, our Lord is represented in the text as having healed a man sick of the palsy. At the marriage in Cana he turned water into wine. At the same place he healed the son of a nobleman who was sick at Capernaum. On another occasion, when watched by the Pharisees, he ordered the man who had a withered hand, to stretch it forth, and it became whole as the other. Again, he restored sight to blind Bartimeus; and he raised Lazarus, and the only son of a widowed mother at Nain, to life.

In each of these and the like examples of our Lord's wonderful works, there are two distinct and palpable facts, which are said to be submitted to the observation of all the people, and of which they were competent judges. The man was sick of the palsy—the man was cured, and carried away his bed. The water-pots of stone were filled with water—when the servants presented the same to the governor of the feast, it was wine. The nobleman left his son at Capernaum dying—he received on his return from our Lord, the certain tidings of his recovery. The man had indisputably a withered hand—it was afterwards whole as the other. Bartimeus was blind—his sight was restored. Lazarus and the youth at Nain were dead; the one had been interred, the other was carried out on the bier as our Lord met him—both lived again.

So of all the other works which were performed by our Lord and his apostles, and which we consider to be miracles. The question is, Did these plain, intelligible facts take place? All who were present are affirmed to have witnessed and known the previous state of the sufferers—and their subsequent altered condition. Whether a miracle was performed in each case, is another question. We now merely put the

previous inquiry. Did certain facts occur? Does the testimony to the facts of the state previous to the interference of our Lord and his apostles, and to the facts of the state subsequent to it—does this testimony deserve belief? Were the events themselves such as are recorded?

These remarks may be applied to the greatest of all miracles—the resurrection of our Lord. It resolves itself likewise into two facts. Did the apostles see and know the death and burial of their Master? This is one fact. Did they see and know the same Jesus their Master alive again—did they converse with him for forty days—and behold him ascending into heaven? Thus the whole question of the truth of the gospel miracles falls back on the credibility. A few remarks will show that that credibility embraces them, and that they are indissolubly connected with the general credit due to the evangelical history.

Three questions, therefore, on the whole, may be proposed: Did the wonderful actions ascribed to Christ and the apostles really take place?—Were these actions undoubtedly miraculous?—Was there such a connexion between them and the religion they attest, as to prove that that religion was from God?

If these questions are satisfactorily answered, we shall have demonstrated all that the case requires; for we shall have shown that **THE FACTS WERE DONE**—that **THE FACTS WERE MIRACULOUS**—that **THE FACTS PROVE THE TRUTH OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION**.

Let me beg the attention of every candid and sincere hearer, (for I address no other,) whilst I detail the proofs of these points, though they will necessarily have some reference to the last lecture. Repetition on so great a topic, if unavoidable, is a small evil.

I. To ask whether the wonderful actions ascribed

our Saviour and his apostles REALLY TOOK PLACE, to move again the question which we have already settled. For it is, in a good measure, the same thing to ask, Whether the credibility of the gospel history, includes the credibility of the works which are the most prominent part of it, and on which the whole rests. If the history be not true as to these, it is not true at all. The wonderful deeds are not subordinate and insulated parts of the account, mere appendages; but the main features. The trust-worthiness of the historians is pledged to the particular events which we call miracles, as the foundation of the entire narrative. The question, then, with regard to them is of the last moment.

A few remarks will show that the credibility embraces the miracles, and that they are indissolubly connected with the general credit due to the evangelical history.

1. For all that we stated in our last lecture, as to the number and character of the witnesses to our Lord's history, as to their simplicity, uprightness, disinterestedness and purity of life, not only applies, but applies chiefly; and in the first place, to these very actions. It was not to doctrines, but to these specific acts occurring under their own eyes, and submitted to their own examination, that they bear their testimony. It was for asserting, especially, the resurrection of their Master, the most astonishing of all the events in the evangelical history, that they endured suffering, reproach, persecution, death. By only not bearing testimony to this and the preceding miracles of their Lord, they might have avoided all suffering and reproach, and have lived in quiet, as we observed in the last lecture; nay, by detecting an imposture, there had been any, they might have risen to reputation, honour, reward. And yet these plain, honest men, the purity of whose lives no one can impeach, persisted to the last, in a firm, consistent, unshaken

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testimony to this miraculous history. Not only so, they go about and preach these specific facts, and the doctrines springing out of them, and live a self-denying, beneficent, holy life; and thus living and bearing witness, they bring upon themselves gratuitously, and with a full knowledge of the consequences, enmity, hatred, peril, and death. Such a testimony never can be disputed or disbelieved, except on principles which would destroy the validity of all testimony, and end in annihilating human intercourse. That such men should invent things entirely false, should then give them out as true, at the peril of life; and should suffer themselves to be put to death, all of them, for attesting that they had seen with their eyes what they did not see, is contradictory to all the known principles of human nature. This is the first point, the number and character of our witnesses prove that, as they are credible in their narrative generally, so they are most of all credible in what is the main part of it, the extraordinary actions performed.

2. Again: what did the converts of the first century believe, and what did they attest to those of the second, but the facts of the gospel miracles, of the resurrection of their Lord especially, and of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, on which Christianity rested its claims?

Their giving credit to a narrative founded on these wonderful operations, included, in the very first place, a belief in the account of those operations. If the works had not been performed, what would have availed all the fragments of the story? If Christ had not really wrought his miraculous works, really risen, really ascended into heaven, and by many infallible proofs assured his disciples of his divine mission; if he had not really poured out the gifts of the Holy Ghost according to his promise, Christians would have had nothing to believe in; the whole of Christianity would have been a lie. But these facts were universally admitted as true by the contemporaries of the

apostles. They rest not only on their testimony, as immediate witnesses, but on the suffrage of the whole Jewish nation, to whom they appealed. This is a most important circumstance in considering the truth of the extraordinary works recorded in the gospel narrative. For the credibility of contemporary history, be it remarked, when uncontradicted, springs not only from the personal qualities of those who write, but also from the suffrage of all their countrymen, friends and enemies, to whom the writings are submitted. In reading the evangelical history, it is the nation, it is the whole age whom we hear. If the works said to be miraculous had not taken place, the cry of indignation raised in all the places where the false accounts came, would have resounded with a tremendous echo to posterity, and have left us in the present age no Christian religion to discuss.<sup>3</sup>

3. I observe, further, that monuments were set up in memory of the wonderful facts recorded in the scriptures at the time when they took place, and have continued ever since. This is one of the marks laid down with such acuteness by Leslie.<sup>4</sup> We have already noticed that the institutions appointed by our Christian books, and still subsisting, prove their credibility generally; but we now apply the observation to the miraculous part of the history. For the mighty works of our Lord, his resurrection, his ascension, the gifts of the Holy Ghost, the miraculous powers of the apostles, were accompanied with the propagation of a new religion, with the promulgation of divine laws; with all the institutions of a peculiar religious society, called the Christian church; with the celebration herein of the sacrament of baptism, as a direct dedication of all its members to their Lord and Saviour; and of the sacred eucharist in commemoration of his death and passion; together with the solemn observ-

<sup>3</sup> Frayssinous' *Defense du Christianisme*, i. 506.

<sup>4</sup> *Short and Easy Method with the Deists*.

ance of the first day in every week to record and signalize his resurrection from the dead—in a word, with all the associations and usages which mark Christian nations. These monuments were set up at the time when the wonderful works were done, and as memorials of them. They owed their origin to them, and to them alone. Every individual in every age of the Christian church has known, and knows, that he was baptized into the name of Jesus Christ, as having established his divine mission by a series of wonderful operations; and that he celebrates the Lord's Supper in remembrance of his death, and observes as sacred the first day of the week, in express commemoration of his resurrection.

Now it was utterly impossible for an impostor to have invented the extraordinary facts of the New Testament, and then have written an account of them and imposed it on the descendants of the first Christians: because such impostor must not only have invented the wonderful facts, and forged the books recording them, but must have contrived also the public actions and monuments connected with these facts; and must further have persuaded the people that they and their fathers had always believed them, and observed the usages from the time of Christ to their own; when every man, woman, and child, would have risen up to contradict him.

A man might as well pretend, any day now, to produce an account of wonderful adventures achieved by some ancient saint or hero a thousand years ago,—by Bede, for example, or Alfred.—and in confirmation of this, endeavour to persuade the Christian world that they had all along, from that time to this, been baptized in his name, and in belief of such wonderful works. Is it possible that such a fraud could succeed?

Or he might, with as much prospect of success, attempt at this day to invent a book of statutes or acts

of parliament for England, and make them pass upon the nation as the old established laws of the country founded on Magna Charta, which they and their fathers had always received and been governed by, when not a creature had ever heard of them. The case refutes itself. In fact, there never was a book of forged laws palmed upon any people since the world began. So certainly do the public actions, usages, and habits of the Christian church, from the time of Christ and his apostles, prove the credibility of the wonderful facts from which they took their rise. The pretence to these facts, if they had not been true, would have extinguished Christianity in its birth.

4. But let the account itself, of each of the supernatural actions, as recorded in our books, be examined, with all the attendant circumstances, and the credibility of them will appear. Take the New Testament into your hands and read it. Observe the inimitable simplicity and truth of the respective narratives. Notice how indissolubly they are connected and interwoven with the whole history. See how naturally they arise out of the preceding circumstances, and join on upon those which follow. Observe the impression which the extraordinary events made, the surprise and astonishment of the attendant multitudes, and their direct ascription of them to divine power.<sup>6</sup> Mark how essential they are to the consistency of the whole story. You discover no art, no patch-work, no second thoughts. The time, the persons, the events before and after; the consequences, the objections raised, all the most minute details, are so exquisitely given, that the veracity of the whole shines out conspicuously at every turn. They cannot be forgeries. Things which might tend to lessen the greatness of the facts, especially the ascription of them by our Lord's enemies to evil spirits, are faithfully narrated.

<sup>6</sup> See some striking thoughts in Mr. Penrose on the IMPRESSION made by our Lord's miracles.



The inability of the disciples to cast out an unclean spirit is noted. The peculiar dignity and reserve, and what I may call the propriety of our Saviour's conduct, his authoritative and yet simple and unaffected manner of doing his mighty works, are beyond imitation. There is no colouring, no amplification, no study of effect, no eagerness to strike wonder, no anxiety to be believed. The evangelists write as those who give a faithful narrative of a wonderful, but real course of action. Nor is it a slight corroboration of all these arguments, that the undesigned coincidences so admirably adduced by critics in proof of the general credibility of the gospel narrative, fall as frequently upon the miracles as on any other events.<sup>6</sup>

The wonderful deeds, then, of the New Testament really occurred. To resist such accumulated evidence, borne by such witnesses, attested by all their contemporaries, admitted by their bitterest foes, corroborated by existing monuments and public usages, and strengthened by all the marks of truth in the accounts themselves—I say, to resist such evidence, not to speculative opinions, but to distinct matters of fact, is to overthrow the very foundations of truth, and to involve men in one bewildering maze of scepticism and absurdity.

And yet this is unblushingly attempted by modern infidels, not by going into an examination of our arguments, or by producing counter-evidence; but by general insinuations against the fallibility of human testimony, by asserting that miracles are contradictory to experience, and by alleging that the proof of remote history is weakened and extinguished by the lapse of time.

But what has the general fallibility of human testimony to do with the strong, unshaken evidence of

<sup>6</sup> See Mr. Blunt's *Veracity*; where the remark is first made, and illustrated with admirable judgment.

upright men to specific events which fell under their own notice? For we are now only considering miracles as to the facts on which they rest. What the cause of them might be, that is, whether they are properly miraculous or not, we do not now inquire; we adduce testimony to the naked facts. Was the man sick of the palsy; did he carry away his bed? Here are two facts. Were the water-pots filled with water; did it become wine? Was Lazarus dead; did Lazarus live again after four days? Was Bartimeus blind; did he receive his sight? Was our Lord crucified; did he live again on the third day? These are the questions.

Now what can general insinuations against human testimony avail in a case like that before us, when every caution has been taken against this very fallibility, and the evidence of numerous unimpeached beholders, with the suffrages of a whole nation, excludes all possibility of mistake? As well might we enter a court of justice, and, when a jury of twelve men upon their oath, under the direction of a learned and impartial judge, have brought in a verdict, upon the testimony of numerous credible witnesses to a specific fact—insinuate some general truisms on the fallibility of human testimony.

It is further objected, that these wonderful works are contrary to experience. To what experience? To that of the objector merely? Then he will shut out all facts of which he is not himself the eye-witness; and the Indian who should refuse to believe on any testimony the fact of water being frozen, would be in the right. But does the objector mean the experience of others? Then he must come to testimony. Thus his objection does not apply. Opposite experience is not necessarily contradictory. In order to oppose experience to miraculous facts, the objector should contrast the testimony of those who professed to have seen miracles, and considered them divine;

to the testimony of those who, under similar circumstances, saw like actions, and considered them not divine, but mere impostures.<sup>7</sup>

Again, it is urged, that the transmission of remote facts is weakened till it becomes extinct. But we are not speaking of a loose, undefined transmission by oral testimony. We are speaking of written testimony, and where a series of separate and credible witnesses, in each age from the present, may be traced up, step by step, till we come to the apostolic. In this view, the Christian church is a society which never passes away, nor leaves a void in the transmission of testimony. The generations of it only change gradually and imperceptibly. The new age of Christians has been baptized into the faith of the great and striking facts of Christianity, and has received the distinct testimony of them, long before the old age has passed off. Twenty or thirty individuals joining hands, as it were, across the lines which divide the centuries, form an unbroken chain from the apostles' time to our own. The successive generations of witnesses imperceptibly passing away in the Christian society, are only like the successive changes in the matter of the same human frame, which possesses always one unchanged essence and form, though some of the particles which compose it are dissipated every moment, and renewed by those which take their place. A man is the same man, whatever imperceptible changes take place in the substance of his body, because his consciousness, his mind, his identity remains. Thus the Christian society continues still the same depository of truth. Consciousness is diffused, as it were, throughout the community. The passage from one generation of Christians to another is imperceptible. The society is always the same body, preserving the memory of certain events, and celebrating actions in commemo-

<sup>7</sup> See a fine remark to this purport in Bishop Van Mildert's Lect. on Infidelity, *in loc.*

ration of them. The church in her eighteenth and in her first century, only differs as a man at seventy years of age differs from what he was at twenty. His consciousness, his memory of certain prominent facts, and his testimony to them, continue as fresh and decisive as ever.<sup>8</sup>

So utterly futile are the objections against the history of the gospel—objections, however, which being sown in the fertile soil of fallen nature, and favouring the pride and sensuality of the heart, require continually to be exposed. Let it be remembered, then, that if men attempt to shake our belief in the testimony to the miraculous facts of the gospel, they resist the common sentiments and most approved practice of mankind; nay, the very sentiments and practice by which they themselves are governed in similar cases. In short, all historical truth, all philosophy, all jurisprudence, all society, depends on the evidence borne by credible witnesses. A reliance on well-authenticated and well-circumstanced testimony is as much a law of our moral nature, as the belief of the ordinary rules by which the universe is governed, is of our intellectual.<sup>9</sup>

But we proceed, in the next place, to consider

## II. WHETHER THESE FACTS WERE, PROPERLY SPEAKING, MIRACULOUS.

That the facts took place is proved; it is admitted also that they were extraordinary. A few considerations will show that they were in the strictest sense miracles.

1. The facts then of the gospel were such plain and palpable suspensions of the order of nature as constitute miracles. They were not facts of the nature of which any doubt could be entertained whether they were in the ordinary course of things or not; but

<sup>8</sup> Frayssinous.

<sup>9</sup> Franks' Hulsean Lectures.

plainly contrary to that course; men's outward senses, their eyes and ears, might judge of them. Raising a body that had been dead four days; restoring instant and perfect sight to the blind; healing by a word, or at a distance, all the diseases incident to our nature; casting out unclean spirits; walking on the sea; calming in a moment the raging of a storm. These works were evidently miracles—suspensions of the laws of nature—bold, sensible, level to every man's comprehension.

2. They were done by Christ and his apostles professedly as divine acts, and were accompanied with that open and undisguised publicity which would have led to their detection had they been impositions. They were performed in the face of the world, or before a sufficient number of competent and intelligent witnesses. They were not fabricated among a few interested persons in a corner. They were done openly in the midst of the assembled multitudes, and before the most bitter adversaries. The man born blind, Lazarus, the paralytic, were seen by their families and neighbours and all the Jews. The few loaves and fishes were multiplied publicly, and partaken of by five thousand men. The entire Jewish nation, assembled at the feast of Pentecost, heard the apostles address them in new tongues. These things were done at noon-day, and were subjected to the examination of every beholder.

Lest, however, it should be said that a crowd are bad judges of a miraculous work, others were performed before individual competent witnesses, and then submitted to the public eye. Peter and James and John, and the father and the mother of the damsel (the persons best able to discern the truth of the restoration to life) were present at the raising of Jairus' daughter: whilst all the people weeping and wailing at her death, and the scoffers who derided our Lord's attempt to restore her, were so many witnesses

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of the truth of the miracle, and, had there been any imposition, would have been so many accusers of the fraud. The circumstances of the damsel's walking, and being capable of receiving her ordinary food, are further proofs of the perfection of the work and its miraculous character.

3. Then the first Christian miracles were wrought, not before a heathen nation, but before the Jewish, accustomed to judge of miracles, and to weigh the evidence arising from them. At that very time they were expecting their Messiah, and therefore prepared to examine with care and jealousy the truth of the wonderful works; and were excited to bitter hostility against our Lord when they heard his doctrine; and scrutinized his miracles with eager desire to detect a fraud. Yet this people admit the miracles of Christ to be notable and decisive; they ascribe them to a supernatural power; the impression made upon their minds, contrary to their wishes and prejudices, is evidently that which undeniable miracles could alone produce; their very endeavours to oppose and resist them, or to explain away the just inferences from them, proclaim aloud the truth of the supernatural operations.

4. Further, our Lord's mighty deeds include such numerous and various suspensions of the course of nature, as, under the circumstances, constitute the most decisive proof of miraculous agency. It was not one or two or three professed miracles, with many failures and a long interval of time between each, which were performed, but a great number, without a single failure, during the whole of our Lord's ministry. His life was a life of miracles. "He went about doing good" in the exertion of an abiding and unfailling miraculous power. More than fifty express instances are recorded—whilst whole masses of them are registered in such words as these, "And Jesus went about Galilee healing all manner of sickness and

all manner of disease among the people; and his fame went throughout all Syria, and they brought unto him all the sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those that had the palsy, and he healed them." And at the close of his history St. John adds, "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book."

Again, these miracles of our Lord were of every sort; some less grand and stupendous, others more imposing. At one time he feeds an assembled multitude; at another he heals the trembling woman that came behind him and touched the hem of his garment. His power was universal. At Jerusalem, in several parts of Judea and Galilee, in streets and villages, in synagogues, in private houses, in the streets, in highways, in different manners, and on every kind of occasion, did he perform his mighty works. Some with preparation and a solemn prediction of what he was about to do, as in the case of Lazarus, and the daughter of Jairus; others without preparation and by accident, as we speak, as the widow's son at Nain.<sup>10</sup> Some, when attended by the multitudes, others when alone with the patient. Most of these works were performed at the earnest entreaty of a father, a mother, a master of a family, on behalf of persons whom they loved; so that our Lord did not choose the subjects of his miracles, but displayed his power in cases where the attention would be most awakened, and the reality of the cures best ascertained. By this variety every attempt at explaining away the accounts is precluded. If some might overwhelm the senses of the beholders,

<sup>10</sup> In the one species of miracle, the raising from the dead, mark the gradations—the daughter of Jairus was just dead and lay like one asleep—the widow's son had been dead some little time and was being carried to the tomb—Lazarus had been dead four days, and corruption had taken place.

as the transfiguration and the ascension; others were submitted to the most sober, deliberate contemplation—as the calming of the sea, the turning water into wine, the feeding the five thousand. No fortuitous circumstances, no exaggeration, can solve the phenomena of miracles varied in every possible form, and which never in a single instance failed of their end.

5. Consider, further, the miracles of which our Lord was the subject, as well as those which he himself performed, for these come within the miraculous proofs of Revelation.<sup>11</sup> He was conceived and born by a direct, miraculous power. Three times during his life did a voice from heaven proclaim him to be the Son of God. At his death the rending of the veil, the earthquake, the supernatural darkness, the opened graves, were divine attestations to his mission. The greatest of all miracles was his own resurrection from the dead. I say nothing of his divine knowledge of the hearts and thoughts of men; I omit the miraculous fast of forty days; I pass by various other demonstrations of superhuman operations. I confine myself to the remark that the distinct miracles I have mentioned, of which our Saviour was the subject, are calculated to strengthen our belief of a truly supernatural character in his own mighty works, and make it more credible.

6. Then the wonderful works of Christ produced such permanent effects on those who were the subjects of them, as to prove their supernatural character. They were most of them performed, indeed, instantaneously; but the effects remained, and were submitted to every one's observation. When Lazarus was raised, he did not merely move and speak, and die again; or come forth out of the grave and vanish away. He returned to his family, and was visited by the Jews from motives of curiosity or malevolence. A momen-

<sup>11</sup> This is one of the fine thoughts with which Franks' Lectures abound.



tary effect may be called in question ; the solid and lasting consequences of a cure, in the abiding health of the individual, attest the finger of God.

7. Lastly, the miracles of the New Testament were done for a high and holy end, an end worthy of the Almighty Creator, which renders a suspension of the ordinary course of nature highly credible. They were not wasted on any trivial occasion. They were not superfluous or undefined in their purpose. The wise and benevolent end was to ascertain the truth of a declaration of God's will ; to mark out the Saviour of mankind from all pretenders ; to give his accountable creatures a due assurance of a divine revelation—such an end is unquestionably neither inconsistent with the divine wisdom, nor unbecoming the divine goodness. So far as we can judge, some such interference was absolutely necessary as an attestation to a religion sent from God. The extraordinary acts were precisely suitable to the extraordinary occasion which called for them. And to those who admit the being and perfections of the Moral Governor of the universe, (and those only I address,) it must appear in the highest degree probable that miraculous works would attend the declaration of his will. With such positive evidence before us, then, the case is undoubted—the wonderful actions of the gospel history were absolutely and palpably miraculous.

But this leads us to notice

III. That there was such a CONNEXION BETWEEN THESE MIRACLES AND THE RELIGION THEY ARE SAID TO ATTEST, as to prove satisfactorily that that religion was from God.

1. For our Saviour and the apostles constantly appealed to their mighty works in proof of their mission. When John Baptist sent his disciples to our Lord to inquire whether he were the Messiah, he bid them return and tell John what miracles they had witnessed,

and what doctrine they had heard. To trace out the manner of this proof, to follow our Lord's various arguments, to study the credentials of the gospel in the gospel itself, to read the Christian evidences as Jesus himself stated them, will give the most entire satisfaction to the candid mind. The progress of the proof—the wise and forcible manner of our Saviour's arrangement of it—the majesty, the compassion, the truth of his appeals, carry their own conviction with them. Every time that we read the gospel, we are more struck with the matchless character of veracity appearing in the proofs which he adduced of his mission. At first he made scarcely any remarks on his miracles; he performed them, and let them speak for themselves. Towards the close of his ministry, again, he wrought but few mighty works, because of the unbelief of the people. But between these periods, the intermixture of arguments and miracles, of appeals to the heart and displays of divine power, form an irresistible evidence to every attentive mind, that his doctrine was divine.<sup>12</sup>

2. Moreover the miracles of our Lord had been predicted as the express evidence of the Messiah. A long previous expectation had been excited, no room was left for conjecture either as to the agent or the design. The wonders of our Lord were not single, unconnected, unexplained prodigies, but miracles performed in consequence of a design avowed long before, and which ceased to be wrought when that design was accomplished. The prophet Isaiah had marked out the very miracles which should designate the Messiah: "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped, then shall the lame man leap as the hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing." We shall see the finger of prophecy pointed to the Messiah still more clearly when

<sup>12</sup> Franks.

we come to the proper place ; but the predictions fulfilled in the miracles of our Lord, fix and designate and seal him as divinely commissioned of God, and as not only a prophet, but the Messiah and the Saviour of the world.

3. And surely we cannot fail to observe the admirable fitness of this attestation to a divine religion. It is a manner of acting worthy of God. Let men reason to support their opinions ; let them establish their doctrines by a course of arguments—they have no right to command the understanding of others. But for the Almighty God, it is not becoming that he should speak as a philosopher who disputes—no, he speaks as a Master who decides ; he supports his religion, not by arguments, but by deeds of omnipotence. His word is truth ; to obey it is the duty of man—and what more worthy of God than to command the obedience of man by visible acts attesting the homage which all nature pays him.<sup>13</sup> Such a proof is level to the capacity of man as man. It is calculated to awaken the attention, and command the assent, and satisfy the doubts, and silence the objections of persons of all classes and conditions. Such an attestation becomes the simplicity and universality of revelation, and carries on it the genuine impress of the majesty of heaven. Miracles are the broad seal annexed by God himself to the grand charter of salvation in Jesus Christ.

4. For it is further to be noted, that the miracles of Christianity were performed by those who had all other signs of a divine mission ; and therefore to whose doctrine implicit obedience was due, as to a communication from God. The mighty works, however palpable and numerous, were not the only credentials of our Lord and his apostles. Every thing else corresponded. Dignity, simplicity, disinterestedness,

<sup>13</sup> Frayssinous' *Défense du Christianisme*.

purity of life, holy instructions, bold rebukes of vice, fortitude, meekness, constancy unto death, were conspicuous in the heavenly ambassadors.

The gift of prophecy distinguished the same and no other persons. The miracles were acts of mercy, deeds of compassion and grace, exertions of goodness and piety. They were not disjointed wonders, but were harmoniously united with the other signs of a mission from heaven. You need not be told that the prodigies of heathenism, even if the facts be admitted, and the other means of solving the phenomena waived, (as the cures said to be performed by the emperor Vespasian, on which Hume relies,) were done by persons who did not even pretend to a divine commission, and who exhibited not one single mark of the messengers of the Most High.

5. The inference, therefore, from the miracles to the truth of Christianity is direct, forcible, conclusive: it speaks to every unprejudiced mind. The language of Nicodemus is the language of the unsophisticated conscience. "We know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles which thou doest, except God be with him." The testimony of our senses is not a more satisfactory evidence of the existence of external objects, than the scripture miracles are of a divine commission. When men born blind suddenly received their sight, when multitudes were cured of the most desperate diseases by a touch or at a distance, when the dumb were made to speak, and the dead were raised, when devils were cast out, and confessed that Jesus was the Son of God, when all nature gave way, and started back at the command of Christ, surely no proof could be more decisive of the immediate presence of the God of nature—surely no language, not even an angel's voice, could proclaim more intelligibly, that God was revealing his will. Surely these wonderful works challenged implicit obedience to the Sovereign of the universe, thus ex-

exercising his dominion over nature—first making the whole creation bow and tremble and obey—and then delivering the record of his stupendous scheme of redemption to an awe-struck world.

6. Accordingly, the miracles of Christianity are so incorporated with the instructions, as to oblige men to receive not only the religion generally, but all the doctrines it communicates, as of divine authority. It is most reasonable to submit with unlimited faith to all that was delivered by messengers thus commissioned and accredited. The wonderful actions which they performed are incorporated and intermingled with the whole substance of their doctrine. The actions without the instructions are unintelligible. If the New Testament history and the New Testament miracles are entitled to credit, then all the New Testament doctrine is entitled to the same. None of the supernatural works were performed for subordinate ends: they did not aim, like the heathen prodigies, to prove the greater sanctity of an altar, or raise the credit of an oracle, or establish the usage of some insignificant rite; but they were performed as the great ends of the mission required, were involved in the most important doctrines, and were directed to the development of one vast scheme, the redemption of mankind.

That men might "know that the Son of God hath power on earth to forgive sins, he saith to the sick of the palsy," as our text particularly notes, "Arise, take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house." That the people might learn that Christ came to destroy the works of the devil, he expelled him from the bodies of the possessed. He was eyes to the blind, ears to the deaf, feet to the lame, and a father to the poor, in the literal sense, that he might afford a pledge of the correspondent spiritual blessing. Those whom he healed, he suffered not to remain with him for the purpose of swelling his retinue, but bade them go to their friends, and "sin no more." To assure the

apostles of their future success in preaching the gospel, he encouraged them by a miraculous draught of fishes to follow him, and become "fishers of men." He taught the universality of his religion, and the admission of the Gentiles into his church, by purifying the outward court of the temple, and driving out in a miraculous manner the Jewish traffickers. He showed the power of faith, by devoting the barren fig-tree to sudden decay and destruction. He encouraged the timid belief of his disciples by calming the tempest. Those multitudes whom he fed by a miracle, were first wearied and faint by a long attendance on his instructions. Thus were our Lord's miracles inseparably connected with the revelation they were designed to attest.<sup>14</sup> The same may be said of those performed by the apostles; every thing had a regard to the high object of the mission: the facts involve the doctrines, and oblige us to receive them.

7. We observe, lastly, that though all false religions have made some pretensions to wonderful works, yet there never was a religion set up and established by miracles, but the religion of the bible. A series of wonderful works like that on which the mission of Christ rests, was never heard of since the world began.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Bishop Van Mildert.

<sup>15</sup> I except, of course, that religion, of which Christianity was the complement and consummation, and with which it formed one connected divine revelation, the legation of Moses.

We have already proved the authenticity and credibility of the books of the Old Testament through the medium of those of the New. Of the miracles which introduced the Mosaic economy, I need not say a word: the very same arguments which support the Christian miracles, prove those of Moses. The four marks laid down by Leslie—that they were palpable—publicly performed—commemorated by national monuments and usages—and that these monuments and usages began at the very time when the mighty works were performed, are perfectly conclusive. I will only add, that there is something

Mankind have, indeed, always expected that God would reveal himself to them by working some things above the course of nature; and therefore there never was any false religion set up, but it professed to be confirmed by some miraculous works or appearances; but these very attempts serve to set forth to greater advantage the undeniable miracles of the scripture.

Mahomet wisely disclaimed the performance of miracles as a test of his divine mission; and though he was not sparing in his account of sensible communications from heaven, his own statements represent him as at once the object of them, and the sole witness.

The prodigies of the heathen were few in number, were attested by no credible witnesses, were insulated and solitary wonders, were never submitted to the senses and examination of mankind, were at best rather subjects of speculative curiosity, than matters with which any serious truth was connected. They totally differ from the miracles of Christ in all their leading features, as well as in their connexion, import, and final cause. Their foundation was chiefly rumour or fable; the wonders themselves are easily resolved into natural causes; the persons who recorded them

of greater magnificence in the Mosaic miracles—they were on a larger scale, and of bolder features, in order to be handed down the better by indelible memorials, through those many centuries, during which written testimony by contemporary authors was impossible. The miraculous passage of the Red Sea, the pillar of fire, the flaming summit of Sinai, the drying up of Jordan, the descent of the manna, the streams poured out from the smitten rock, the prostrate walls of Jericho, were miracles of that prodigious grandeur, as to stand forth palpably from the scene, and to remain visible, as it were, from that remote age to the present. The milder and less stupendous, but not less divine, miracles of the New Testament, were at once more suitable to the genius of the religion, and more adapted, so to speak, to a learned period, when contemporary writings could hand down with ease to future ages the authentic records of the minutest divine operations.

lived at a remote age and in a distant country. Besides, there is no proof that any of these religions was set up in the first instance by means of these alleged supernatural works. Not a single miracle can be named that was ever offered as a test of any of these religions before it was established. Their miracles were appendages, not proofs; and the reception of them was the effect, not the cause of a belief in the religion with which they were connected.<sup>16</sup>

The Christian doctrine looks down on these pretences from the glorious height on which it stands. The conviction of the probability of miracles for attesting the divine will, in the minds of all who admit the being and providence of God, prepared the way; and the miserable impotency of all false religions in their pretences to them, left the whole field unoccupied for the clear and undoubted miraculous operations which usher in the scripture revelation. They stand as the single series of divine works, to attest the single series of divine communications which was ever made to man.

And here let us observe, that, as under the head of the Authenticity, we found that the Christian books were the only records professing to contain a divine revelation written by the first teachers of that revelation, and submitted to the examination of mankind; and as again under the head of the Credibility of those books, we discovered that no account of the admitted facts of Christianity was ever given but the narrative therein contained; so now, under the head of Miraculous operations, we see that no other religion was ever attempted to be established in the first instance by miracles, but the religion of the bible. Thus solitary, in unapproachable dignity, stands the proof of the gospel.

<sup>16</sup> The above remarks, with a slight variation, apply to the miraculous works ascribed to the Roman Catholic Saints.

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I. Are you not then convinced, for I must pass on to the CONCLUSION, by the statements laid before you? I address the docile and sincere. Does not the impression left on your minds by the review of the Christian miracles, resemble that which was produced on the multitudes in whose presence they were first wrought? Yes, all your previous hesitation and doubts are dispersed. You feel the force of truth. You are "astonished beyond measure." You "glorify God," with the people in our text, "saying, We never saw it on this fashion." You bear witness to the grace and power and divine mission of the Son of God.

The impression, the first dictate of the unsophisticated conscience, the language of the heart of man, on reading the miracles of Christ, is, "Thou art the Son of God, Thou art the King of Israel. This is the prophet that should come into the world. He hath done all things well." We have probably now quite as strong evidence of the divine miracles as the first Christians. We have not seen them indeed with our eyes, and so the sensible proof cannot be so lively, but other parts of the demonstration are more clear to us. The concurring marks of the Messiahship of Christ are more distinct; the direct miraculous character of the wonderful works is better recognized. Those doubts, for instance, which arose from the notions of magic, of the occult powers of nature, and the agency of evil spirits, are passed away; and with the brighter light of modern philosophy and science, we distinguish far more decisively the miracles of Christ from the ordinary course of God's providence.

II. Let us, then, yield to the conviction which these miracles are designed to produce. Let us pray to God for his grace that we may renounce all interfering prejudices and appetites, and submit unreservedly to the Christian doctrine. Miracles only

serve to introduce the Saviour, to verify his doctrine, and then to send us his promises, his warnings, his encouragements. Miracles cannot give a right disposition of heart. That must be sought for from the Holy Spirit, whom our risen Lord poured out upon his church. We have great cause to fear for ourselves. If we harden our hearts to the voice of conscience, no arguments can convince, no moral proofs subdue. It is probable that external evidences to miracles could NOT be stronger than ours actually are, considering the nature and circumstances of man as a responsible creature.<sup>17</sup> But this is nothing if the heart be fixed on the world and sensual pleasure; if the will be debauched by vice; if the understanding be perverted and blinded by pride and conceit.

Let the example of the heathen philosophers at the time of our Lord, be a warning to us. For what did Tacitus and Suetonius and Seneca and Pliny know of the Christian doctrine? What conviction did the miraculous works of Christ produce on their minds? "The preaching of the cross was foolishness" to them. In their proud search after wisdom, and their contempt of the whole Jewish nation, they looked not beyond the surface. They examined nothing with candour and seriousness. They never approached the Christian question. They dismissed it, so far as they heard of it by rumour, as unworthy their regard. With the same spirit as the modern literary unbeliever, they gave no heed to the divine message, bestowed no pains on ascertaining its truth, and lived and died in the gross and miserable bondage of their vices and ignorance. Such is the tendency of pride in the fallen heart of man. Let us guard against the first approaches to such a state of mind. Let us be led by the miracles to a serious study of the Scriptures, that

<sup>17</sup> Penrose.

we may see the doctrine of a crucified Lord to be “the power of God and the wisdom of God.”

III. But we must not rest in a formal adherence to the Christian faith. The example of the Jews may warn us against this opposite, but not less dangerous, evil. They were near the Saviour. They saw his miracles. They received, at the time, the deepest impression of his divine mission. They knew and acknowledged, at first, that he was the Christ the Saviour of the world. But as our Lord afterwards developed his character and doctrine, as he rebuked the vices of the Scribes and Pharisees, condemned their traditions, exposed their hypocrisy, expounded the spiritual nature of his kingdom, and called them to repentance and conversion, they began to hate his person and steel their hearts against his most decisive miraculous works. They persuaded themselves that he opposed their law, which they well knew to be divine. They attributed his miracles to evil spirits. They tempted him by cavils, and watched for his words that they might accuse him. They persisted in their unbelief, till that came upon them which was spoken of by the prophets, “By hearing ye shall hear and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see and shall not perceive. For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed: lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.”

That you may avoid this awful state, yield now to the conviction which calls you to heaven. Open wide the gate, so to speak, that the truth may enter in. Close your ears to vain objections, and your hearts to corrupt pleasures, and give yourselves up to preparation for the doctrine of Christ. “Now is the ac-

cepted time, now is the day of salvation." The glorious apparatus of miracles brings you up to the feet of Christ. There fall prostrate. There confess your sins. There implore his mercy. There renounce every criminal passion. There supplicate the inward influences of grace. There enter upon new resolutions of obeying the religion you profess, and acting on the evidences you have received. Remember, the higher you rise in privileges, the lower will be your fall, if you abuse or neglect them. The knowledge you have been blessed with, cannot but bring with it a correspondent accountableness. Call to mind the doom of those cities in which our Lord's mightiest deeds had been performed—"Woe unto thee, Chozazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained unto this day."<sup>18</sup>

May God grant that the blessed purpose of our Lord's miracles may be fulfilled in our humiliation and salvation! For this is their high end—"These things were written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name."

<sup>18</sup> St. Matthew xi. 21—23.

## LECTURE VIII.

## PROPHECY.

## 2 PETER I. 16—21.

*For we have not followed cunningly devised fables when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were witnesses of his majesty. For he received of God the Father honour and glory, when such a voice came unto him from the excellent glory, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard when we were with him in the holy mount. We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture cometh by any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.*

IN the last lecture, we considered the proof of divine authority of the Christian religion, derived from the miracles which were wrought in attestation of it.

We now proceed to consider the second great branch of the same proof, that from prophecy; the na-

and importance of which are fully developed in the words of the text. It will be recollected, that the state of our general argument is this. We have abundantly proved the AUTHENTICITY and CREDIBILITY of the books of the New Testament, and by them established those of the Old. Indeed, the former are built upon the latter, and recognize them in almost every page.

We have also demonstrated the DIVINE AUTHORITY of the New Testament from the evidence of miracles; which includes again the divine authority of the Old. For Christianity is the completion of the religion of Moses; his miracles, doctrine, and legation, are repeatedly and solemnly attested by our Saviour and his apostles, and declared to be from God.

The Old and New Testaments, therefore, are true; the sacred books are all genuine, and were severally published at the time when they profess to have been—the facts occurred as they are there stated; every thing may be fully credited, so far as the historical question goes. Moreover, the religion contained in the Holy Scriptures is proved to be of divine authority, to the extent of the evidence which miracles afford.

We now come to the second proof of this divine authority, arising from the clear and undoubted prophecies which have been fulfilled, and are now fulfilling before the eyes of men, in the events and revolutions of the world.

A proof this of surprising force, and as much displaying the interposition of Almighty God as miracles. Nay, more so—not as to the truth of the interposition, but as to the extent and prominence of the display of the divine attributes. Miracles are proofs chiefly of the omnipotence of God; but prophecy exhibits also the foreknowledge, the omniscience, the wisdom, the truth, the moral sovereignty of the supreme Governor of the world.

The argument arising from prophecy follows that from miracles. Prophecy is designed not to give immediate conviction—its very nature forbids that—but to lay in the materials of conviction, for those who should witness the accomplishment of its predictions. Miracles, therefore, being a direct, independent evidence of a divine communication, and waiting for no remote fulfilment, were the fit attestation, in the first instance, of a revelation from heaven. The Law was introduced on the evidence of miracles: but when Moses had proved his own commission by these immediate credentials, he delivered predictions of a greater Prophet; which, concurring with those of the patriarchs, and leading on to the whole series of predictions which designated the person of the Saviour, and the nature of his kingdom, made the evidence from prophecy essential to the future ages of the Church. The Jews being in possession of a religion attested by miracles, would have still adhered to it, unless something in that very religion had taught them to look for a new dispensation at the coming of their Messiah. To them, therefore, prophecy was indispensable; and accordingly our Lord not only performed miracles as a prophet of God, but professed to be the Messiah foretold in the Jewish scriptures. The fulfilment of the predictions, therefore, relating to the Messiah, furnished the appropriate confirmation of all those claims which rested on our Lord's miracles and doctrine. Thus, as our text observes, we have "the word of prophecy" made more sure.

Prophecy also is important to the Christian church as a perpetual testimony to the truth of divine revelation, both in the predictions already accomplished in the person of Christ, and in the history of the Jewish people and neighbouring nations; and in the gradual fulfilment of those extended chronological predictions which embrace all the succession of events to the end of time.

The prophetic argument of course requires a more patient attention than that derived from miracles. Miracles were palpable, instant, direct appeals to the omnipotent God, subject to the immediate senses, the eyes, and ears of man: prophecy requires time, and a cautious and minute comparison of the language of the sacred oracles with the correspondent fulfilment. The argument is of a slower growth and a longer period; but when fairly established, brings in all the perfections of Deity in attestation of a divine revelation: it is a standing miracle.

And if the prophecies are found to be pronounced by the same persons, and for the support of the same doctrines and no other, as were supported by the miraculous operations—that is, if those who wrought the miracles delivered the predictions; and those who delivered the predictions performed the miracles, the result in point of evidence is the more triumphant.

Let us now proceed to consider this evidence of scriptural prophecy in its GENERAL FEATURES AND SCHEME; and then let us give a specimen of the ACTUAL AND CLEAR FULFILMENT OF ITS PREDICTIONS BEFORE THE EYES OF MANKIND.

We shall confine ourselves to the first of these divisions on the present occasion. We shall here begin by laying down a definition of prophecy—we shall then point out its vast extent—the union and harmony of all its parts in the person of the Saviour—the infinite wisdom apparent in the contrivance and arrangement of these parts—the divine commission and unimpeachable moral conduct of the persons who delivered the several predictions—and the important practical uses which prophecy has subserved, and still subserves, in the church. These particulars constitute what we may call the general features, or scheme of divine prophecy.

## I. SCRIPTURAL PROPHECY IS THE DECLARATION



BEFOREHAND OF SUCH EVENTS AS CAN BE KNOWN ONLY TO THE OMNISCIENT GOD. It implies the undoubted prediction of future and often remote occurrences, dependent on the contingencies of human affairs, and frequently on the character and conduct of persons at the time unborn; so as distinctly to mark the foresight and sovereignty of the infinitely wise and powerful Creator and Governor of the world.

The conjectures which the most sagacious of mankind may venture to indulge with respect to futurity, are, as we all know, few and hazardous; and are only rarely confirmed, and then very partially, by events. The oracles of the heathen were of this kind; they were merely, as our text expresses it, "cunningly devised fables," designed to soothe the immediate apprehensions of men as to some pending concern, calculated to gratify the depraved passions of earthly rulers and conquerors, and aiming at the advancement of those who delivered them, to wealth, authority, or reputation. They were couched, moreover, in loose and ambiguous language; were very seldom accomplished; and then, perhaps, by some disgraceful play upon terms. They were little more than the guesses of jugglers and fortune-tellers.<sup>1</sup>

Divine prophecy is no "cunningly devised fable;—it came not at any time by the will of man." It is the clear prediction of important events connected with the salvation of mankind; events so numerous, so circumstantially marked out, so entirely beyond the

<sup>1</sup> When Cræsus consulted the oracle at Delphi, relative to his intended war against the Persians, he received the following reply: *Κροισος Ἄλυν διαβας μεγάλην ἀρχὴν καταλύσει*; "Cræsus crossing the Halys, shall destroy a great empire." This he naturally interpreted of his overcoming the Persians. He was himself conquered, and lost his empire. The juggling oracle, however, by the ambiguity, saved its credit.—Herod. lib. i. c. 53; Suidas, iii. 382; H. Horne, i. 4. § 3.

reach of human conjecture, and delivered by persons designated by such undoubted credentials to the sacred function, as to carry upon it the impress of divine prescience and wisdom—"Prophecy came not of old time (margin, at any time) by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

II. The **EXTENT** of scriptural prophecy is vast in various points of view. Its records occupy a large portion of the volume of inspiration. It began to be uttered when man fell; and ceased not till the close of the Jewish dispensation. At the birth of our Lord it broke forth again, and sunk only with the last accents on the lips of the last of the apostles.

Its parts are distributed over the various dispensations of religion for four thousand years. Guilty man was not thrust out of paradise, till prophecy had whispered some hope of a future Saviour. Predictions of the flood preceded that tremendous judgment; and a prophetic declaration that the deluge should not return, accompanied its cessation.

The call of Abraham was attended with a prophetic annunciation of the land of promise, and the seed in whom all nations should be blessed.

Jacob, on his dying couch, foretold the increase of his sons, the twelve patriarchs; and the continuance of the lawgiver in Judah till the advent of Shiloh.

After the long-predicted bondage of Egypt, prophecy rekindled its torch, pointed out the "prophet like unto Moses;" and then sketched the most remote events of the Jewish story; whilst Job and the unwilling testimony of Balaam came in about the same time, to testify of the future Redeemer, and of the star that was to arise out of Jacob.

After a cessation of prophecy, from the time of Moses, of about four hundred years, Samuel arose,<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> B. C. 1451—1056.

amidst the decay of religion and the extreme corruption of the priesthood, the first of a new series of divine messengers. The age of prophecy, emphatically so termed, now began. David came first and tuned his harp. The remarkable prophet Jonah<sup>3</sup> followed; then Hosea, Amos, and Micah; who led on the choir of the greater prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel.

The latter of these accompanied the Jewish people to Babylon,<sup>4</sup> where Daniel arose and spake of the seventy weeks reaching unto Messiah the Prince. Haggai and Zechariah aroused the languid nation on their return, and Malachi<sup>5</sup> announced the herald of the Saviour.

As a pause of four hundred years intervened after the death of Moses, so did a like pause hush every whisper of prophecy till Christ our Lord arose—ushered in, according to the prophetic declarations, by his precursor, John Baptist, and predicted the destruction of the Jewish city, and the dissolution of their polity. His blessed doctrine St. Paul followed first, and then St. John,<sup>6</sup> taking up the strain of Daniel, expanding the visions which he had recorded, and pronouncing the predictions which have been fulfilling ever since, in the events of the world.

Thus extensive IN POINT OF TIME, prophecy was not less so in respect of THE DISPENSATIONS which it subserved, the OBJECTS which it embraced, the MODES of its being communicated, and the PERIODS of its fulfilment. The nations bordering on Judea, the greatest heathen states, the succession of empires as connected with the church, the punishment of guilty individuals and of kingdoms—events near and remote—were the objects of prophetic vision. The writers of the prophecies were of every different class;

<sup>3</sup> B. C. 975—862.

<sup>5</sup> B. C. 396.

<sup>4</sup> B. C. 606.

<sup>6</sup> A. D. 96.

some kings or princes, others patriarchs and heads of tribes, others prophets or priests, others legislators, others shepherds or fishermen. Their natural abilities, education, habits, and employments, were exceedingly dissimilar. They received the divine communications, by various methods—voices from heaven, dreams, visions, angelic messages, direct impressions of the sacred Spirit. They wrote laws, history, odes, devotional exercises, doctrines, and controversy.

Moreover, the various usages and rites, the institutions and persons connected with the worship of God, the princes raised up to rule over the people, the very land in which they reposed as their inheritance, were prophetic symbols of future blessings. Every thing was pregnant with the prescient spirit under the former Testament.

It is quite obvious that this wide range and prodigious extent gives to the argument from prophecy, when verified by the respective fulfilments, an importance and sublimity, a sort of impress of divine magnificence, which surpasses all we could have conceived. We have not one or two oracular declarations, but a whole system of predictive grandeur running through every period of time, and stretching on to the consummation of all things.<sup>7</sup>

III. Then the union and HARMONY OF ALL ITS PARTS in the person and salvation of our Lord, as its CENTRE POINT, increases the proof of divine prescience. It was not indeed necessary to the establishment of a divine revelation, that a connexion should subsist between the various and widely spread ramifications of prophecy. The foretelling of any distant and unconnected events would have attested the Christian reli-

<sup>7</sup> It is impossible to make this fully apparent to any but the serious student, who has really read the Bible with attention. To others, the references of this branch of our argument must appear confused.

gion. But it has pleased God to keep one grand end in view, to unite the scattered rays of light in one bright and refulgent object, the person and kingdom of the Messiah.

When the apostle sums up in the text the prophetic records, he says, he had "made known the power and coming of Christ;" and in a similar passage in his first epistle, he describes the prophets as "testifying beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow." The "testimony of" or concerning "Jesus," says St. John, in his Apocalypse, "is the spirit of prophecy"—the scope, end, consummation of it. "To him give all the prophets witness," is the language of St. Paul. And our Lord himself said to the Jews, "Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they that testify of me." And, "beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto his disciples in all the scriptures, the things concerning himself."

The first coming of Christ is the centre of one great division; the second coming of Christ comprehends the other. Remote as were the times when the prophecies were delivered, and unconnected as the divine messengers frequently were with each other, they are all found to illustrate one design, and that design the most dignified, the most beneficent, the most important to man, the most glorious to God which could be propounded. From the primeval promise in paradise, to the last of the apocalyptic visions, one theme, one mighty subject prevails; not always prominent, but always to be collected by a careful examination of the several particulars, their dependence on each other, and their reference to one common end. The entire riches of the prophetic inspiration are poured at the feet of the Son of God. A spirit of prophecy pervading all time, attaching itself to one person, and proclaiming the progress and accomplishment of one purpose of exuberant grace, gives an attestation to

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the Christian religion so sublime, so irresistible, as at once to convince the judgment and captivate the heart.\*

IV. The INFINITE WISDOM apparent in the contrivance and arrangement of its parts, in subservience to this one great end, is a further evidence of a divine hand in the prophecies of the Scriptures. St. Paul, accordingly, on the contemplation of one branch only of the great scheme, assures us that "unto the principalities and powers in the heavenly places is made known by the church the manifold—multiform, variegated—wisdom of God." A similar sentiment is expressed by St. Peter, in the passage of his first epistle, to which I have already referred, and which is an appendage, as it were, of my text. After reciting the solicitude of the ancient prophets to "search what and what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow"—the apostle adds in terms, brief indeed, but sublime beyond expression, "which things the angels desire to look into."

In this respect the argument from prophecy differs widely from that from miracles. Miracles, though permanent in their effects, are in themselves brief suspensions of the general laws of nature, subject at once to the eyes and ears and other senses of all who witness them, and, therefore, exacting the instant assent of the beholder. The more clear and sudden and surprising miracles are, the better they accomplish their end, that of proving a direct divine interposition. Not so the word of prophecy. The argument here arises, as we have already intimated, from a patient

\* See Bishop Hurd, to whom, and Bishops Sherlock and Horsley, I need not say, I am much indebted in this department of the argument. Mr. Davison's incomparable work has also greatly aided me throughout this lecture.

comparison of the prediction with the fulfilment, from a consideration of a variety of small and, apparently trifling coincidences, from a careful examination of all the records of history, and from a study of the entire scheme by an analysis of its parts. The more therefore of wisdom there is developed in this scheme, the higher the proof of divine interference.

And what language can describe the infinite contrivance of the prophetic word? The difficulties to be overcome were many and insuperable, except to the divine mind. A direct and unveiled discovery of futurity would not have been prophecy, but the disclosure of the "secret things which belong unto the Lord our God." Such a discovery might have excited a perilous curiosity, might have opened a door to the charge of collusion on the part of some of those who now unconsciously have fulfilled the divine declarations; and would have been altogether inconsistent with the uniform order of God's moral government of his rational and accountable creatures. Man could not have comprehended the mighty plan, and much less have fitly executed it.

On the other hand, if too dark a gloom had shrouded the divine predictions; if the time and persons and age and place on which the fulfilments were to fall had not been marked, and marked definitely and clearly, the whole argument would have lost its force.

Further, it pleased God to appoint that four thousand years should elapse between the fall of man and the advent of the Messiah; that the advance of light and grace from the first dawn to the meridian day should be gradual, through successive measures of communication, under different dispensations; that the temporal condition of the ancient church should be exposed to enemies and dangers, and be more than once brought to apparent destruction by oppression and captivity.

Now to meet all these various exigencies, was a task

which only God himself could accomplish in a prophetic revelation. And it is accomplished in a manner which it is impossible for the human mind sufficiently to admire. There is an intermixture of clear and obscure predictions; there are topics of consolation plentifully scattered throughout the prophetic revelations; there is a gradual development of the person and kingdom of the future Messiah; there is an adaptation of the different sets of prophecies to the several dispensations of God's will; and there are intermediate and partial accomplishments of them in temporal and civil deliverances granted to the Jewish people, which attested the truth of their prophecies to successive ages.

All this bears the very image and impress of a heavenly wisdom. "The prophecy came not of old time by the will of man;" nor does it admit "of any private interpretation"—from the fancy of an individual, or the opinions of the prophet himself, or the mere letter of the prediction apart from the system to which it belongs. Every prophecy has its own precise and determinate meaning, fixed by the wisdom of that presiding Spirit by whom it was dictated, and to be gathered from a comparison of all the parts of the great scheme with each other, and with the corresponding events of Providence. A few prophecies indeed are unveiled minutely, and at once direct us to the precise occurrences or persons in which they are accomplished. The duration of the captivity in Babylon, the name of Cyrus, the deliverer; the precise time of the advent of Messiah, and many particulars as to his birth and sufferings, are described with the minuteness of historical narrative. But the prophecies generally were tempered with less clear predictions; were composed partly of temporal and partly of spiritual blessings; looked forward, through intermediate accomplishments, to their ultimate and most complete design; stopped sometimes on their



march to console the church with instant assurances, and then directed their course onward to distant and more spiritual blessings ; communicated, in a word, near and urgent benefits as pledges of remote and eternal ones.

Thus the promise of Canaan made to Abraham, was a pledge of the prophetic seed “ in whom all nations were to be blessed ;” and when accomplished, lighted up the hopes of the faithful in expecting that seed. Thus Moses was a figure of that greater prophet, whose grace was to supersede his economy. The kingdom of David was thus a figure of the dominion of the eternal son of David. The deliverances from Egypt and Babylon were types of spiritual redemption : and the judicial destruction of Jerusalem and of the Jewish polity, a symbol of the final judgment.<sup>9</sup>

In this way the prophetic scheme, in its progress, illustrates itself, and its parts prepare for and sustain each other. The fulfilment of the civil and temporal predictions, were the pledges and credentials of the accomplishment of the spiritual, in the first coming of the Messiah ; whilst, again, these last support the credit of those which relate to his second advent. In this manner the prophecies were so far veiled, as to disappoint a vain curiosity before their accomplishment ; and so far clear as to be perfectly unambiguous afterwards ; whilst the several particulars are so scattered over the sacred canon, as to reward the humble and diligent student, and him only, with the most satisfactory conviction of the divine intention pervading the whole.

And this is the explanation of what has been very properly termed the double sense of prophecy, that is, of predictions bearing a temporary and near, as well

<sup>9</sup> *Vetus Testamentum recté sentientibus, prophetia est Novi Testamenti.* Austin, contr. Faust I. xv. in Hurd.

as a spiritual and remote, import and accomplishment. This two-fold application marks a divine contrivance. They are not ambiguous or fanciful meanings, the private interpretations of men; but both descriptions of blessings were in the design of the Almighty, and the one was intended as the type and vehicle of the other. These are," as Lord Bacon finely speaks, "the springing and germinant accomplishments," throughout many ages; though the light and fulness of them refer to some one age."

"For these ends," observes Bishop Hurd, "the use of symbolical language (the ordinary poetical style of the eastern nations) was peculiarly adapted. The successive scheme of Providence could only be signified together, in a mode of language that contracted or enlarged itself as the occasion required. A figurative style is so proper to that end, that we can scarcely conceive how it could be accomplished by any other. For none but this hath fold and drapery enough, if I may so speak, to invest the greater subject; while yet (so complying is the texture of this expression) it readily adapts itself to the less considerable, which it ennobles only, not disfigures. It is the ordinary, accustomed dress of the one; and the robe of state for the other."

And if the double sense and the symbolical style serve also to cast an intentional obscurity over much of the prophecies, (that very obscurity which the immensity of the plan, the nature of the subject, and the moral genius of the revelation to which prophecy belongs, rendered expedient,) this still further marks a foresight inimitable by human art or prudence.

That many branches of the prophetic scriptures, and much of its general scope, are sufficiently perspicuous even to the world at large, is manifest from the indignation which the bitterest adversaries of Christianity have betrayed. The objections of the modern

Jew, admit all our chief predictions to be applicable to the Messiah, though they deny that our Jesus was he; that is, they admit the predictions to be sufficiently intelligible. The prophecies concerning the four empires of the world, and that of the destruction of Jerusalem, were so well understood by Porphyry and Julian the apostate, in the third and fourth century of the Christian æra, as to induce them to make different, but equally resolute, attempts to weaken and overturn their authority. The hardy assertions of modern unbelievers,<sup>10</sup> that parts of the prophecies were composed after the events, are the most striking concessions which adversaries can make. These involuntary witnesses admit the prophetic inspiration; and at once silence all objections on the ground of their obscurity.

On the other hand, the rash and eager curiosity of too many persons in every age to pry into unfulfilled predictions, and the gross follies into which they have been betrayed, serve to show that if much larger measures of light had been thrown over the contexture of them, all the evils and confusion which we before adverted to, would have arisen. These opposite testimonies proclaim, with a loud voice, the infinite wisdom and contrivance of the divine system.

V. Nor is THE CHARACTER OF THE PROPHETS themselves a consideration of small moment.

We observed, when we were speaking of the evidence derived from miracles, that they were performed by persons who had every other sign of a divine commission. A similar observation may be made here.

Our sacred prophets were not, like the heathen priests, the creatures of a base polytheism, driving a gainful trade, and communicating their oracles only occasionally, and upon the inducement of large gifts,

<sup>10</sup> Bolingbroke, Voltaire, &c.

without any holy doctrine, any connected purpose, or any one sign of a divine authority, either in themselves or in the religion which they supported. No. The characters of Abraham and Jacob; of Moses and Samuel; of Isaiah and Jeremiah; and of the prophets of the succeeding age, proved that they were "holy men of God, who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

1. They had a solemn mission and call known by all the nation. "The word of the Lord came" to them. They were set apart to the prophetic function. The mantle of the dying seer fell on the survivor.

2. They were men of sincere and elevated personal piety. Their holy lives became their office, and gave assurance of the inspiration with which they spake. Balaam and Caiaphas were indeed of a different character; but they are branded with the divine reprobation; and leave the sincere devotion of Samuel, and Moses, and David, and the other prophets, the more illustrious.

3. Their prophecies were but a small part of their general instructions; the great body of their doctrine was designed to teach the people all the practical parts of a divine religion—a religion the most pure, the most elevated, the most beneficent—as far above all other instructions ever given by man, as the Lord whom they served was superior to the idols of the heathen. They proclaimed the being and providence of God; they exposed the pretensions of the Pagan deities; they put the truth of their mission on the footing of their declarations, and dared the false prophets to the prediction of futurity; they called men to repentance, conversion, and newness of heart; and they proffered the merciful promises of pardon and grace. In the midst of this course of doctrine, and in order to encourage the people to yield to it, they delivered their sacred oracles of a Saviour to come.

4. Moreover, their messages were often of the

most distressing nature to their personal feelings, and the most obnoxious to the kings and princes of Israel and Judah. They were the pastors, and monitors, and reprovers of the great and powerful. "Lamentation, and mourning, and woe, were often written within and without" the prophetic scroll. The offices of Nathan, and Gad, and Elijah, and Jeremiah, and Amos, compelled them to denounce the most unwelcome truths, under the most trying circumstances.

5. They also gave every sign of integrity, by suffering even unto death in the cause for which they pleaded. Frequently had the prophets to meet, not only the ordinary enmity of the human heart, but all the force of the secular arm, all the irritation of monarchs and princes, roused by false prophets. They were martyrs to the words which they delivered:—"Thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee," was the reproach addressed to Jerusalem by our Lord.

6. Then they record minutely all the circumstances which might seem at first sight to make against them: they conceal not their own errors. Thrice doth Moses record his exclusion from Canaan on account of his unadvised expressions. The false prophets, who opposed the servants of God, with their places and characters, are faithfully described; and the world is left to judge between them. Nothing is concealed: admonitions are expressly given against unauthorised prophecy, and rules laid down for distinguishing between the true and false. The attempts made by the opponents of Micaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, are carefully described. Even the arts of wizards and diviners; of Elymas, for instance, and Simon Magus, in the New Testament, and of the Egyptian sorcerers under the Old; are inserted, and thus the materials of judging furnished.

7. Moreover, the same individuals, who were endowed with such personal qualities, and delivered such

predictions, performed the miracles. Here are no rival pretensions: the supernatural power of foretelling future events, and of performing miraculous works, attest the same doctrines and none other. It was morally impossible, then, that the Jews should have received their messages, and have registered them amongst the inspired books, if they had not known them to be the recognized prophets of the Lord. It was their mission, their character, their doctrine, their patience under sufferings, their whole authority as inspired instructors, which induced their countrymen to receive the denunciations, and endure the reproofs and exhortations, which they addressed to them. The marks of divine prescience and authority, it was impossible to misunderstand. Such "holy men" were assuredly of God, and spake "as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

VI. But we promised to notice, lastly, **THE PRACTICAL AND IMPORTANT ENDS** which the scheme of prophecy subserved and still subserves in the Church. It is not merely the broad and clear nature of it—its vast extent—the harmony of all its parts in the person of the Saviour—the infinite wisdom apparent in the contrivance of those parts—and the holy, suffering characters of the prophets themselves, which are indications of a divine hand; but also the direct practical uses to which it was and is applicable.

In every dispensation of the former ages, prophecy was, as our apostle beautifully describes it in the text, "a light shining in a dark place, unto which they did well to take heed, till the day dawned, and the day-star arose in their hearts."

The use of prophecy, although not designed for immediate conviction, was yet in other important respects immediate. It was wrought up into the system of religious doctrine and instruction; it formed an integral part of the divine revelation, for the guid-

ance and encouragement of the Church in each age. It directed the eye of hope to the spiritual blessings of the future Saviour ; and by this hope sustained pure religion in the Church, and by its means, in the world.

At the instant of the fall, the prophecy of the seed of the woman cast a light across the gloom. From the fall to the flood, this promise, and the institution of sacrifices, nourished the faith of man. The call of Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees, and the prediction of his seed as a blessing to all the nations of the earth, lighted up a new flame of truth, when the original revelation had become nearly extinct. The tradition of this prophetic hope, figured by the land of Canaan, sustained the patriarchs ; so that they “all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and been persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims upon earth.”

When all, again, was apparently lost in the Egyptian night, Moses with the word of prophecy kindled the hope of a future Saviour ; and warned and encouraged them by the prophetic promises and threatenings which are fulfilling at this very day. From Samuel to Malachi, need I tell the important and directly practical ends of the predictive inspiration ? Need I remind you of those holy hymns of the royal psalmist, which first united the expectation of the Messiah with the devotions of the Church ; and which even now teach us to sing Hosannahs to the Son of David ? Need I dwell on the evangelical strains of Isaiah, cheering the people under the approaching captivity, when so deep a gloom was about to rest upon the word of promise, with the predictions of a Redeemer, in terms too glorious to find its accomplishment in any temporal deliverance ? Or is it needful for me to point out the uses of Jeremiah's faithful warnings and bright visions of “the Lord our righteousness”—or of

Ezekiel's predictions of the effusions of grace, and the gift of newness of heart—or of Daniel's prediction of Messiah the Prince, with the everlasting righteousness which he was to bring in—or of the other prophets before and after the captivity?

Prophecy was, indeed, “a light shining in a dark place;” prophecy unfolded the person of the Saviour; prophecy formed, in connexion with the sacrifices, the priesthood, and the preceptive part of the divine law; the gospel of the ancient Church. As time rolled on, the light increased: each dispensation caught a brighter anticipation of future blessings. Prophecy had a temporary and immediate aspect on the people's duties, their return to God, their discipline and reproof when revolting, and their encouragement when walking in obedience; but it had also a remote and more comprehensive respect to the coming of him who was the desire of all nations. And thus, at length, the day of the gospel “dawned, and the day-star arose in the hearts” of the faithful.

Under the New Testament, the use of the word of prophecy is of course different, but is not the less important. We look forward to no further dispensation. We live in the last times. The sun of righteousness has arisen. What the word of prophecy was to the Jews, that the doctrine of Christ is to the Christian Church. Expectation of spiritual blessings characterised the legal dispensation; the possession of them marks the evangelical.

Still the practical importance of the word of prophecy is great. The comparison of the predictions and prophetic symbols of the Old Testament, with the respective persons and things which accomplish them in the New is, first of all, essential to our faith in Christ as the true Messiah; and is, secondly, a source of joy and hope, and promotes growth in grace and in the knowledge of Christ, in the sincere and humble

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student. We have the word of prophecy confirmed by the correspondent events.

Then, much of the predicted diffusion of the gospel remains yet unaccomplished. The limits of the Christian Church are narrow ; its purity is low and variable ; the triumph of the eastern and western apostacies, after eleven or twelve centuries, continue ; the progress of missions is slow. The world is still, comparatively speaking, " a dark place." We do well then " to take heed" to the word of prophecy still—more especially to that which relates to " the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ"—" as unto a light shining" upon our path, until " the day" of a brighter glory " dawn, and the day-star arise in our hearts." The prophecies of the New Testament join with those of the Old, in explaining to us the present state of the church and of the world ; and thus sustain our faith of the second coming of Christ, and teach us " to be looking for, and hastening unto the day of the Lord."

Thus, most important practical ends are accomplished by the voice of prophecy. Many such attended the delivery of it under the Old Testament. The expectations of the church were fixed on the first coming of Christ ; true religion was preserved ; consolation was afforded under national distress ; the means of recognising the Messiah were abundantly furnished. The prophecies were, indeed, obscure in many other respects ; but as to the practical purposes of them, they were clear. All the wants of the Jewish church were supplied.


In like manner, the wants of the New Testament Church are met—the mission of our Lord is confirmed ; faith is strengthened in comparing prophecy with its fulfilment ; and the hope of the further blessings promised to the church is sustained.

And as the prophecies of both Testaments are gra-

dually fulfilling, the faith of the Church in each passing age marks the divine hand. The accumulation of accomplished predictions confirms our hope more and more, with the lapse of time, and teaches us to expect the complete and final fulfilment of all our warmest desires for the conversion of the world.

Thus gloriously does the divine prophecy shed its beams amidst the darkness of the world. When the miracles and doctrine of our Lord, in agreement with the ancient predictions, had established his claims to the Messiahship, and the apostles had promulgated the new dispensation to mankind, the church was left to support itself for some period on the undoubted tradition and explication of those proofs. By the time, however, that those miraculous powers had lost something of their impression by the flow of ages, the additional evidence of prophecy was preparing to supply its place with still greater efficacy. The predictions with regard to the state of the Jewish and Christian Church, began to improve into evidence, as miracles failed. And thus the latter times of the church have more than an equivalent for what was, in the nature of the case, confined to the earlier. Prophecy is the last and concluding evidence. This marks a divine hand. The proof from miracles loses something of the vividness of its effect from the distance of time ; (not indeed of the force of conviction, when examined, but of the vividness of the emotions produced as it lies in history;) but the proof from prophecy gains strength from that very cause, and is therefore admirably fitted to accompany the church to its latest period. The two unequivocally attest the divine authority of the religion, of which they form an integral part.

A review of some of the more remarkable instances in which this vast scheme of prophecy has been ful-



filled, and is now fulfilling in the world, will be the object of our next lecture.

I. In the meantime tell me, in conclusion, if this prodigious scheme has not the IMPRESS UPON IT OF THE INFINITE MAJESTY OF GOD. Tell me whether any kind of evidence can, in its own nature, be more distinct and clear—whether any proof can be of an extent more becoming the majesty of God—whether its parts can converge in a centre-truth of more sublimity and grace—can be developed with more exquisite contrivance—can be communicated by messengers of more purity and integrity, or be directed to ends more worthy the Almighty and most blessed God.


I see you already are convinced by this display of divine wisdom. The evidence from miracles has prepared you for this different and yet more astonishing testimony from prophecy. The union of the two overwhelms the mind with the superabundant proof. You listened with increased attention as we passed over the rapid survey, and your heart was touched and moved. You saw the wide and irreconcilable distinction between all the petty and miserable conjectures of men, and the majestic and widely-spread ramifications of the holy revelation of God. The dignity and glory of the divine Saviour, incarnate for the redemption of man, seemed to you a suitable and natural centre around which such a system should be placed. All is in proportion.

II. PROCEED, THEN, IN YOUR COURSE OF HUMBLE AND CAUTIOUS INQUIRIES. Study with sacred awe the amazing subject. You now more clearly comprehend the reason of our insisting so repeatedly on the right temper of mind in the inquirer into the Christian Evidences. If a man may neglect and reject the palpable proof from miracles, as we showed to

have been the case with the Jews at the time of our Lord, he may also misinterpret the divine prophecies. If our minds are prejudiced against the spiritual and humiliating doctrines of Christianity, and we come to the investigation with pride and scorn, we shall discover no harmony in the scheme of prophecy, we shall derive no confirmation from it in favour of the Christian doctrine. In such a state of mind, all is perverted, misunderstood, abused. If the deductions of mathematical science were placed before us as the medium of proof for such holy doctrines, in such a state of mind, we should reject them.

But to the teachable and candid heart, touched with a sense of the weakness and ignorance of man as a creature, with his demerit and blindness as a sinner, and thirsting for heavenly wisdom, the prophetic word is as rivers of water in a desert land. He traces its rise in paradise. He follows the stream as it flows onward. He marks the union of all the tributary waters in one majestic and widening course. He perceives that each refreshes and fertilizes the immediately adjoining banks, as it rolls on to successive regions. He views the collected torrent pouring into a new hemisphere. He drinks himself of the living waters; and whilst he partakes of its blessings, rejoices in beholding its diffusion and expansion through every region of the world.

III. STUDY, THEN, THE SACRED VOLUME WITH HOLY AND INCREASING DILIGENCE. It is there you will learn the scheme of divine prediction, and the gradual development of it in various dispensations. This is the only safe method of studying a divine revelation. The opinions of men as to what prophecy might or ought to be, and what should be the clearness of its declarations, are out of place. We might as well speculate on what ought to be the operations of nature and the laws of motion. The duty of man



is to study the natural world according to the phenomena which present themselves to his examination; and to study a scheme of divine prophecy on the principles which it lays down, and by a contemplation of its several parts, according to its own plan.<sup>11</sup> We study prophecy aright when we study it in the Bible, when we derive our first data from its records, observe on what scheme it professes to proceed, and compare the fulfilment with the predictions to which they correspond.

It is one advantage of this method, that it leads men to become acquainted with the whole of the sacred volume. A certain knowledge of the contents of that book is essential to the comprehension of the argument. It is not possible, by quotations, to supply the materials for a judgment. The prophetic scriptures must be examined for themselves. "Nor is this the only instance," says a great writer, referring to the prophecies, "wherein our means of judging of revelation depend on some personal study of it. Scepticism is often no more than a form of very unreasonable enthusiasm, demanding conviction without the pains of inquiry."<sup>12</sup> Unbelievers, generally speaking, know nothing of the Bible. Nominal Christians too often know but little more of it. It demands all our attention. It is the study of a life. The simplest Christian, indeed, with the use of marginal references and chronological tables, may trace out much of the vast theme. His heart assists his understanding. The glory of God, shining in the face of Jesus Christ, guides his footsteps. But in the full development of the divine system, there is employment for the noblest powers, and the longest and most diligent research. It is remarkable that even the prophets themselves understood not adequately their own sacred oracles—"The prophecy came not by the will of man. They

<sup>11</sup> Bishop Hurd.

<sup>12</sup> Davison.

spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. They inquired and searched diligently what or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ that was in them did signify." Let this teach us humility, and stimulate us to diligence in the heavenly science.

IV. LET US, HOWEVER, ALWAYS KEEP IN VIEW THE PRACTICAL ENDS OF THE STUDY. We do well to "take heed to the word of prophecy, as unto a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in our hearts." This holy purpose—this cheering view of a future world—this obedient attention to present duty—this anticipation of a heavenly and eternal state which is opening upon us—this is the high end of the prophetic word. Thus hope is sustained—thus present afflictions are tolerated—thus painful duties are made more easy—thus, as events confirm and make sure to us the sacred system, we render praise and glory to God.

Let us guard against "private interpretations"—against "the will of man"—against prying with unhallowed curiosity into unfulfilled prediction—against indulging fancy and conjecture. The church has seen, in different ages, the mischiefs arising from this practice. Nothing tends more to discredit the magnificent subject—if any thing could discredit it—than the impertinence of human conceit, especially if united with ignorance and dogmatism, in deciding on unfulfilled predictions; and, instead of waiting for the slow but sure comment of events, and interpreting prophecy according to the general import of the system to which it belongs, rushing in with unhallowed haste, fixing on an interpretation on partial grounds or insufficient evidence, and then attempting to impose on others the opinions we have espoused ourselves. True wisdom, as well as modesty, appears in the holy and cautious use of the prophetic revelation; which should never be approached but with a recollection that it

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was written under the inspiration, and must be interpreted according to the entire record and testimony, of the Holy Ghost. Then will the practical ends of it be answered. The scheme, so far as it has been accomplished, will fill us with admiration, love, gratitude, and reliance on a divine guidance in all future events. When we read the unfulfilled portions, we shall content ourselves with those holy exercises of faith and anticipation, which they are calculated to excite. In cases where a real doubt may exist, whether the predictions are fulfilled or not, we shall pursue our inquiries with humble fear. In all cases, we shall keep in mind that the main use of the prophetic word, is not to establish us as inspired seers—not to enable us to pronounce, as our Lord did, on the exact manner of the accomplishment of each prophecy—but to afford us, in a world where futurity is to us impenetrable darkness, that friendly, though feeble light, which may not, indeed, dispel that darkness, but guide and cheer our faith through the midst of it, till “the day dawn and the day-star arise in our hearts.”

## • LECTURE IX.

## THE FULFILMENT OF PROPHECY.

## PART I.

## ISAIAH xli. 21—24.

*Produce your cause, saith the Lord ; bring forth your strong reasons, saith the King of Jacob. Let them bring them forth, and show us what shall happen : let them show the former things, what they be, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them ; or declare us things for to come. Show the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods : yea, do good, or do evil, that we may be dismayed, and behold it together. Behold, ye are of nothing, and your work of nought : an abomination is he that chooseth you.*

HAVING presented a general view of scriptural prophecy, we proceed to give a specimen of the actual fulfilment of it in events which have undeniably occurred, or which are now taking place in the world ;



and the effects of which remain before our eyes, for the confirmation of our faith.

And here two main topics demand our attention.

The first, the accomplishment of the PROPHECIES OF THE MESSIAH, in the person of our Lord.

The second, the fulfilment of those CONNECTED WITH HIS DISPENSATIONS TOWARD THE JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN CHURCHES.

We begin with the fulfilment of the PREDICTIONS OF THE MESSIAH in the person of our Lord. Every child before me knows enough of the sacred scriptures, to be able to point out the exact accomplishment of many of these predictions. But such is the dignity and importance of the subject, so entirely does the whole scheme of prophecy centre in it, and so momentous is it to all the ends of Christianity, that I must enter somewhat at large into its details. I shall only consider, therefore, on the present occasion, the prophecies of Christ; reserving for a second part of this lecture those connected with the Church.

And here we must direct your notice,

1. TO SOME DISTINCT PREDICTIONS, broadly and palpably marking out the Messiah, and most clearly fulfilled in our Lord.

1. For the time, place, family, name, and fore-runner of the Messiah were expressly foretold.

His birth was to take place when the sceptre was departing from Judah, and the lawgiver from between his feet;<sup>1</sup> it was to be while the city of Jerusalem and the second temple remained standing;<sup>2</sup> it was to be when a general expectation of him should prevail;<sup>3</sup> whilst the royal house of David continued distinct from others, though exceedingly depressed;<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Gen. xlix. 10.      <sup>2</sup> Isa. xl. 9; xli. 27; Haggai ii. 6—9.

<sup>3</sup> Haggai ii. 7; Mal. iii. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Isaiah xi. 1; liii. 2; Ezek. xxxiv. 23, 24.

it was to be at the distance of seventy weeks, or four hundred and ninety years from the edict to rebuild Jerusalem, after the captivity in Babylon.<sup>5</sup>

The place of the Messiah's birth was expressly fixed to be Bethlehem Ephratah, so called to distinguish it from another Bethlehem in the tribe of Zabulon.<sup>6</sup>

The family from which he was to spring, was that of Abraham, through Isaac and Jacob, to Judah; and from his tribe, to the royal line of David, the son of Jesse.<sup>7</sup>

His name was predicted to be Emmanuel, or, as the angel expounds it, Jesus, because he should "save his people from their sins."<sup>8</sup>

Lastly, a messenger was to be sent before his face to prepare and make ready his way.<sup>9</sup>

Distinct notices these; yet every one of them accomplished in our Lord, and designating him, by their particularity, to be the true Messiah.

2. But, further, various details were given, in the prophetical records, of the life, sufferings, death, and resurrection of the Messiah, whose name and descent were thus distinctly fixed.

These prophecies include his birth of the seed of the woman, and of a virgin in an extraordinary manner;<sup>10</sup> his flight into Egypt;<sup>11</sup> his entry into Jerusalem, riding upon the foal of an ass;<sup>12</sup> the cry of the children who surrounded him;<sup>13</sup> the gentleness and compassion of his manner of teaching;<sup>14</sup> the zeal he expressed for the worship of his Father;<sup>15</sup> the price

<sup>5</sup> Daniel ix. 24, 25.

<sup>6</sup> Micah v. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Gen. xii. 3; xviii. 18; xxvi. 4; xlix. 10; Isaiah xi. 1; Ps. lxxxix. 4, 27.

<sup>8</sup> Isaiah vii. 14; Matt. i. 21—23.

<sup>9</sup> Mal. iii. 1; iv. 5; Isaiah xl. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Gen. iii. 15; Isaiah vii. 14.

<sup>11</sup> Zech. ix. 9.

<sup>12</sup> Isaiah xlii. 2, 3.

<sup>11</sup> Hosea xi. 1.

<sup>13</sup> Ps. cxviii. 25, 26.

<sup>15</sup> Ps. lxix. 9.

at which he was betrayed, and the use to which the money was applied; <sup>16</sup> the treachery and awful end of one of his disciples; <sup>17</sup> the sufferings he should endure; his back given to the smiters, and his cheek to them that plucked off the hair; his face dishonoured with shame and spitting; his wounds, bruises, and stripes; his being cut off from the land of the living; the mode of death by which he suffered; the sad companions of that death; <sup>18</sup> the gall offered him in his agonies, <sup>19</sup> the spear that transfixes his side; <sup>20</sup> the taunting language of the multitude, the parting of his garments, and the lots cast on his woven vest; his bones not broken; the very words which he uttered in inconceivable agony on the cross; his manner of commending his departing spirit to his Father; <sup>21</sup> his grave made with the wicked, and with the rich man his tomb; <sup>22</sup> his not being left to see corruption; his being shown the path of life; <sup>23</sup> his resurrection the third day; <sup>24</sup> his prolonging his days, and seeing his seed; and there being no end of his kingdom. <sup>25</sup>

I need not tell you that these and many other particulars were accomplished in the person of Christ, and confirm, beyond all hesitation, the claim resting on the circumstances of the time of his birth, his descent, and the messenger who preceded him.

3. But more than this. Not only were those numerous events predicted which infallibly mark out our Lord as the true Messiah; but also such other events were foretold, as constituted of themselves independent proofs of a divine mission. The miracles of Christ were, as I have before observed, the object of divine prophecy. The lame that walked, the blind that received their sight, the lepers that were cleansed, the

<sup>16</sup> Zech. xi. 12, 13.

<sup>18</sup> Isaiah liii. *passim*.

<sup>20</sup> Zech. xii. 10.

<sup>22</sup> Isaiah liii. 9.

<sup>24</sup> Jonah i. 17.

<sup>17</sup> Ps. lxix. 25.

<sup>19</sup> Ps. lxix. 21.

<sup>21</sup> Ps. xxii; xxxi. 5,

<sup>23</sup> Ps. xvi. 10, 11,

<sup>25</sup> Isai. lii. 10, 11; ix. 7.

ead that were raised to life—miracles in themselves, iginal marks of a divine commission—were foretold f the Messiah. “When Christ cometh, will he do reater things than these?” was the remark of the ultitude when witnessing our Lord’s mighty works.

The doctrine also which Christ taught, the gospel ddressed to the poor, the consolation and peace in- used into the breasts of the broken-hearted, were ob- jects of prediction. The sermon preached at Nazareth, ad been delivered before by the prophet Isaiah.<sup>26</sup>

The agreement of the prophecy with the event, in uch instances has an additional force, because these iracles, conjoined with the doctrine, were of them- selves credentials of a divine authority.

4. Further, such particulars were foretold of the Messiah as constituted, in connexion with those al- eady considered, a character of the most peculiar ind, and uniting qualities and attributes apparently he most contradictory; and therefore, if found in the erson of our Lord, proving his Messiahship in a still ore decisive manner. For, besides his sufferings dready noticed, he was to be a branch from the root of Jesse,<sup>27</sup> to grow up as a tender plant, and a root out of a dry ground; to be rejected and despised of men, o be oppressed and afflicted,<sup>28</sup> to be a worm, and no nan,<sup>29</sup> to be the servant of rulers,<sup>30</sup> to be a stone of tumbling, and a rock of offence,<sup>31</sup> to have no form nor comeliness, to be hated without a cause,<sup>32</sup> to endure hame and reproach,<sup>33</sup> to be accused by false wit- nesses,<sup>34</sup> to have his visage marred more than any nan;<sup>35</sup> in a word, to be emphatically the Son of nan,<sup>36</sup> a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.<sup>37</sup>

And yet, on the other hand, the Messiah was to be

<sup>26</sup> Isaiah lxi. 1—3; Luke iv. 16—29.

<sup>27</sup> Isaiah xi. 1.

<sup>28</sup> Isaiah liii. 2, 3, 8.

<sup>29</sup> Ps. xxii. 6.

<sup>30</sup> Isaiah xlix. 7.

<sup>31</sup> Isaiah viii. 14.

<sup>32</sup> Ps. lxix. 4.

<sup>33</sup> Ps. lxix. 7.

<sup>34</sup> Ps. xxxv. 11, 20.

<sup>35</sup> Isa. lii. 14.

<sup>36</sup> Ps. viii. 4—7.

<sup>37</sup> Isaiah liii. 3.

the Son of God,<sup>38</sup> the Shiloh,<sup>39</sup> the Star out of Jacob,<sup>40</sup> the Redeemer, the Living One,<sup>41</sup> the chief cornerstone,<sup>42</sup> the Lord of David,<sup>43</sup> the Ruler and King of Israel,<sup>44</sup> Emmanuel, God with us;<sup>45</sup> Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the Father or Possessor of eternity;<sup>46</sup> whose goings forth were of old from everlasting;<sup>47</sup> the supreme God,<sup>48</sup> Jehovah,<sup>49</sup>—in a word, the object of adoration, hope, devotion, confidence, love, and religious homage;<sup>50</sup> the eternal and immutable Being,<sup>51</sup> the Creator of all things.<sup>52</sup>

It is hardly necessary to observe, that these high, and yet humiliating descriptions; these prophecies of depressed mortality and exalted glory; these names of manhood and of deity; of frailty and of power; of the creature and the Creator; were all fulfilled, and fulfilled clearly and plenarily in the person and character of Christ; and fix, by the apparent contradictions which they involve, the identity of his person. This Man of Sorrows he was, as well as the King of Glory. Nor has there ever appeared a person beside him, during the four or five thousand years which have elapsed since some of these prophecies were delivered, to whom these wonderful, and varied, and numerous, and apparently contradictory particulars were ever capable of being applied.

It may assist the mind in conceiving the force of this part of the argument, to be reminded, that the probability of any number of particular facts occurring in the case of any one person, is exceedingly small. Supposing only fifty independent circumstances had been predicted of the Messiah, and that there was an equal chance, to use the language of mathematicians,

<sup>38</sup> Ps. ii. 7, 12.      <sup>39</sup> Gen. xlix. 10.      <sup>40</sup> Numb. xxiv. 17.

<sup>41</sup> Job xix. 23—27. <sup>42</sup> Isa. xxviii. 16.      <sup>43</sup> Ps. cx. 1.

<sup>44</sup> Isa. vi. 1—3.      <sup>45</sup> Isa. vii. 14.      <sup>46</sup> Isa. ix. 5, 6.

<sup>47</sup> Micah v. 2.      <sup>48</sup> Isa. xlv. 21—25.      <sup>49</sup> Jer. xxiii. 6.

<sup>50</sup> Ps. ii. 12; xcvi. 7.      <sup>51</sup> Ps. cxviii. 25—29.

<sup>52</sup> Isaiah xlv. 10, 11.

for the happening or the failure of any one of the supposed particulars, the probability against the occurrence of all the particulars in any way, is that of the fiftieth power of two to unity, that is, greater than eleven hundred and twenty-five millions of millions to one. And this computation is exclusive of the considerations of time and place. It supposes also the affairs of the world to be left to blind chance.<sup>53</sup> I only mention this circumstance in this cursory manner; the argument needs it not.

But I observe,

II. That the NUMBER AND VARIOUS AGES OF THE PROPHETS by whom these predictions were delivered, and THE INDEPENDENCE OF THEIR PREDICTIONS one of the other, increase the proof of divine prescience.

The numerous predictions which we have cited, to which many more might have been added, were not delivered by one prophet at any one given period. If they had; if every one of the prophetic marks of the Messiah had been foretold, for instance, by Haggai or Malachi after the Babylonish captivity, the argument would have been conclusive. But there is much more in the case before us as it actually stands. We have a succession of prophets during four thousand years, who arise one after another, to predict these things of the same person, the Messiah. We have a chain of prophecies, the links of which are indescribably minute, or apparently unsuitable to each other, and yet which form, when brought together, one unbroken series.

The first prediction of the birth of the great Deliverer was uttered, as we have more than once observed, in the garden of transgression, four thousand years before its accomplishment. Two thousand years from this time passed before the family of Abraham was

<sup>53</sup> Gregory.

designated. After a lapse of three or four more centuries, the descent of the Messiah was limited to Judah; and after another interval of six or seven hundred years, to the house of David, the son of Jesse. Another prophet, separate from all the preceding, and three hundred years later than the promise to David, fixes the place of the Messiah's birth. Isaiah about the same time announces, that a voice in the wilderness should call on men to prepare his way. But an express precursor and messenger was only predicted, as prophecy was closing its first commission, at a distance of three hundred years from the preceding.

And it is to be observed, that this series of continually narrowing limitations, did not in any way arise, the one from the other, by any human deduction or calculation. They were all independent prophecies. It by no means followed from the Messiah being of the seed of Abraham, that he should descend from the tribe of Judah. It by no means followed by any necessary deduction, from the prophecy of the sceptre in the tribe of Judah, that David's should be the individual family from which the Messiah was to spring. It in no way followed, from the descent from David, that the birth should be at Bethlehem; nor did it follow from any or all the preceding limitations, that a voice, uttered by a messenger like to Elijah, should introduce the Messiah.


So far from any succeeding prophet deducing the matter of his predictions from those who went before him, he did not himself fully understand his own. "They inquired and searched diligently what and what manner of time the Spirit of Christ that was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." Each prediction, therefore, in every age, was a distinct sign of a divine prescience; and the harmony of all in the one person of Christ, was a most illustrious proof of the infinite wisdom from which the whole proceeded.

But not only are the long succession of prophecies, and the independence in the delivery of them to be noticed ; we are to observe, further, that here is an entire people, as Pascal remarks, who announce the Messiah by all their institutions, usages, laws, ceremonies, the whole of their religion : this people subsist from the time of Moses to Christ, to give in a body their testimony to their assurances of his coming, from which nothing can divert them, however threatened or persecuted. Here is a national and religious polity, all the parts of which are symbols, in one way or other, of the kingdom of Messiah. The priesthood, the tabernacle, the temple, the sacrifices, the festivals, are all representative of the same blessings ; and unite with the predictions of the prophets to point out the same extraordinary person. It is not only all this ; but it is all this subsisting till the Messiah appeared, and then dissolving and vanishing away ; the people dispersed, (as we shall see in the second part of our present lecture,) the polity annihilated, the institutions closed, the prophetic voice silenced, the whole scene withdrawn, in order to throw an unsullied brightness around the person and kingdom of the Saviour, for the faith and adoration of mankind.

To say that all these wonderful predictions, accomplished in the Messiahship of Christ, prove a prophetic inspiration, and the truth of the revelation which it communicates, is to say little—they pour upon that revelation, and upon the Saviour, a flood of evidence and of glory, which is entirely in harmony with the unparalleled dignity of his person, and the infinite value of the benefits he came to procure for man.

But we may remark,

III. That the CIRCUMSTANCES CONNECTED with the accomplishment of these predictions, and especially THE ACCUMULATION OF PROPHETICAL INSPIRA-






TION, increase the proof of divine foreknowledge in the prophecies which we are considering.

1. Had these several predicted events occurred in the history of our Lord, in any manner whatever, the necessary proof would have been furnished of his Messiahship. But in all the main particulars, there was an apparent improbability to be overcome, step by step, by an arrangement of divine providence; and thus the marks of a supernatural agency, both in the predictions and the fulfilment of them, are multiplied.

The birth of the Messiah was to be at Bethlehem; but Joseph and Mary were inhabitants of Galilee. In what manner, then, is the event brought to answer the prediction? A decree issues from Cæsar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. The blessed virgin and Joseph go up to Bethlehem, the royal city, because they were of the house and lineage of David. "And so it was, that whilst they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered." By this arrangement of providence, the birth of Messiah at Bethlehem is more distinctly marked, and the lineage of the virgin noted; whilst the publicity of the taxing fixes the date of the nativity; and the whole displays a divine foreknowledge and wisdom, first unfolding in prophecy the events which it afterwards accomplished. Similar remarks may be made on other parts of our Lord's history, and especially on his last sufferings.

2. But the accumulation of prophetic inspiration is yet more striking: for there is not only an arrangement in the accomplishment of the prophecies of the Messiah, but a new prophetic inspiration attending that accomplishment. Not only is John Baptist the precursor of the Messiah, but, lo! an angel appears to his father Zacharias, foretels his birth of Elizabeth; who was barren as well as advanced in age, expounds



the prophecy of Malachi, adds new circumstances, announces the name of the Baptist, and inflicts a punishment on the unbelieving and astonished father. This is what I term an accumulation of prophetic inspiration. In like manner, an angelic message announces to the favoured virgin, that she should be the mother of our Lord, and predicts the circumstances and manner of the miraculous nativity : a similar message relieves Joseph from his perplexity, designates the name which the divine babe was to receive, and describes before-hand his future office.

When our Lord entered upon his ministry, his doctrine and miracles, as we have already noticed, not only fulfilled the required terms of the ancient predictions, but were in themselves independent proofs of a divine mission. But what shall we say, when we further find an accumulation of prophetic inspiration, in his teaching and predictions ? He has himself an original prophetic spirit, which marks him out as commissioned of God. The Holy Ghost rests upon him without measure. He reads the hearts of men, he predicts their thoughts, he foresees their motives and conduct. His wonderful prophecy of the destruction of the Jewish metropolis, temple, and polity, we shall consider in our second part. But his life is pregnant with the word of prophecy, and that as to events not immediately connected with the predictions of the Old Testament. He declared to the weeping penitent, that wherever his gospel should be "preached throughout the whole world, there what she had done should be told for a memorial of her." He foretold the resurrection of Lazarus. He predicted the circumstances attending the triumphant entry into Jerusalem, as well as those of the preparation for the last paschal festival.

Then, as to his own character as Messiah, what superhuman prescience is apparent in his comments on the ancient oracles ! The sermon at Nazareth, we

have mentioned in another view. His exposition of the mission of John Baptist, and of the types—the brazen serpent, the manna, and the passover; his appeal to Moses; his assertion of the joy of Abraham at the prospect of his advent; his declaration concerning Jonah; his explanation of the stone which the builders rejected, to say nothing of many of his parables, prove his knowledge of the whole scheme and force of the predictive scriptures.

The same is apparent, from our Lord's prophecies of his own sufferings and death, which are in such detail, and with the addition of so many particulars not at all necessarily arising from the language of the Old Testament, as to show his own prophetic character. Did he not declare, that the temple after three days should be reared again? Did he not foretell the minute circumstances of his sufferings before there was the slightest probability of such events occurring; his death by crucifixion, contrary to the Jewish mode of punishment; the treachery of Judas; the very day on which he should be put to death; and the additional and new fact, not deducible from any ancient prophecy, that he should be "delivered to the Gentiles?" Did he not predict explicitly his resurrection on the third day, and fix the spot where he would meet his disciples?<sup>53</sup> Did he not, in a word, re-announce in literal and express terms, what the prophets had uttered in figurative and general language; thus furnishing the clue for unravelling the whole mystery of prophecy concerning the Messiah as David's son, and yet David's Lord; and reconciling all the apparently contradictory attributes of the promised Saviour, the character of his kingdom, and the purposes for which he was manifested?

Even during his most cruel sufferings at the tribunal of the Jews, and the bar of Pilate, he knew all things

<sup>53</sup> Frank's Hulsean Lect.

that should come upon him, and acted accordingly; and on the cross, "that the scriptures might be fulfilled, he said, I thirst;" and, "when all things were accomplished," uttered those memorable words, "It is finished;" and then commended his soul, in the predicted terms, into the hands of his heavenly Father.

But it was after the resurrection, that the prophetic spirit appeared most conspicuous in our Lord. Joining the sorrowing friends as they walked to Emmaus, he urged the predictions of the ancient sacred scriptures, and inquired whether the Christ "ought not to have suffered" what he had endured, and "to enter into his glory;" and then, "beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." Yet more complete was his instruction to the assembled company, when he delivered his last commission. He then referred, in the first place, to his own predictions: "These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms concerning me." In these expositions, he had repeatedly shown that his sufferings and death would not annul the other prophecies accomplished in his birth, miracles, and doctrine, but establish and complete them. "He then opened their understandings, that they might understand the scriptures;" leading them to see one consistent and ever growing testimony to his character, office, and proceedings, as the Messiah, in the prophetic writings. He next said unto them, "Thus it behoved Christ"—the Christ,—"to suffer, and to rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem:" that is, the Messiah was to rise, not in order to be exalted to an earthly throne, but to be a Saviour-Prince, "giving repentance to

Israel, and remission of sins." This it behoved the Christ to do. The original promise of a deliverer from evil, the succeeding prediction of the patriarchal age, the typical observances of the law, the prayers, promises, and predictions, found in the latter prophets, all asserted these spiritual blessings of the Messiah's kingdom. Lastly, he added, "And ye are witnesses of these things. And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high." Upon the fulfilment of this express prediction, our Lord rested the truth of his Messiahship, and with this prophetic assurance ascended up into heaven.<sup>54</sup>

I know not how it may strike the minds of others, but I confess it strikes my own most forcibly, that this accumulation of prophetic inspiration in the accomplishment of the predictions of our Lord, adds an additional weight to the whole proof of prescience in the scheme of prophecy with respect to him. It seems to crown the argument. It displays before the eyes of mankind, not only unnumbered distinct particulars fulfilled in the person of Christ, and these particulars foretold by various independent messengers during four thousand years, but this accomplishment attended with a new exhibition of the spirit of prophecy in the very person in whom they were fulfilled.

The Messiahship of our Lord thus stands out radiant with the beams of the divine glory, and combines not only the fulfilment of all the predictions which went before of him, but the fulfilment of them with such circumstances of divine conduct, and such overwhelming attestations of an immediate mission from heaven, as to astonish every considerate mind.


<sup>54</sup> These predictions evince, indeed, divine omniscience in our Lord; but I use them only for what my present argument demands, the proof of prophetic inspiration.

But in what way; it may be asked, are the effects of the accomplishment of these prophecies of the Messiah apparent before our eyes in the present day? This leads me to consider,

IV. The SPIRITUAL OFFICES predicted of the Messiah, which our Lord fulfilled, and is now fulfilling, in the church.

His bodily presence is indeed no longer amongst us. We cannot witness his miracles nor hear his doctrine. These we receive by the means of undoubted testimony. But the spiritual offices and functions of the Saviour and Redeemer of mankind, grounded on his personal sufferings and obedience unto death, and committed to him by the Father as the reward of those sufferings, are exercised by him in every age, and are the hope and joy of his church. He has "been with it always," according to his promise, and he will continue to be so, "till the end of the world." The great blessing of the Holy Ghost, on the mission of whom he rested all the truth of his Messiahship, was vouchsafed on the day of Pentecost; and the apostles, endued with the powers of that divine Spirit, went forth to preach the gospel, which has reached us, and brought us out of darkness into God's marvellous light. These effects we witness every day. All who are truly sincere in their Christian faith, are receiving constantly the benefits resulting from them; whilst to others, the external position of the church, its extension, and solemn celebrations, are sufficient evidences of the truth of what we assert. What office, I ask, of the Messiah, has not and does not the Son of God, in his state of exaltation, fulfil?

Did he not, and doth he not, "bruise the serpent's head?" Did he not "spoil principalities and powers, and make a show of them openly, triumphing over



them on his cross?" Has he not, and doth "destroy the works of the devil?"

Is he not also our "Shiloh," gathering unto an universal church, "having made peace by t of his cross?"

Is he not, again, "the prophet like unto M a living oracle, the constant authorized expo God's will during his whole ministry—res Moses in the fulness of his communications wi the magnitude of the revelation made to him, institution of a religion founded on this revelat

Is he not "the redeemer" referred to by J was to "stand in the latter day upon the earth

If we come to the Psalms, what is there s what so spiritual and exalted, foretold of the M which our Jesus has not fulfilled, and does not

If we plunge into the evangelical riches of what is there, even in his extended and my prophecies, which our Lord has not fully plished? Did he not "preach the acceptal of the Lord?" Have not the "Gentiles com light, and kings to the brightness of his rising not the "Spirit rested upon him?" Has he does he not, "bring forth judgment to the Ge Is he not a "covenant for the people, a light Gentiles?" Does he not say, by all the minis of his gospel, "Look unto me and be ye s the ends of the earth?" Has he not foun universal church, upon the footing of his sacri being "wounded for our transgressions, and for our iniquities?" In a word, is he not, a predicted he should be, the Redeemer, the M the Teacher, the Intercessor, the Deliverer, the Saviour of men?

What did Jeremiah foretell of the new cove

Ezekiel of the effusion of the Holy Ghost, or Joel of the gifts of grace, which our Emmanuel did not bestow?

Do not, I ask, sincere Christians behold in him all these spiritual attributes, and derive from him all the blessings of his divine offices and directions? I know that irreligious persons cannot enter into these particulars. Such objectors I refer to the preceding proofs of the Messiahship of Christ. But for others, I have a right to appeal to those spiritual blessings which the prophecies declare to flow from the advent of the Saviour. I ask, Is he not their shepherd, their friend, their brother, their prophet, their master, their ruler, their king, their high priest, their divine chief and head?

If such, then, be the palpable fulfilment of the predictions of the Messiah in the present kingdom of our Lord—if such be the broad and manifest events themselves, such the number and independence of the prophets who foretold them, such the accumulation of the spirit of prophecy attending their accomplishment, and such the exalted spiritual offices exercised by him in every age;

I. Let us **FALL PROSTRATE IN HUMILIATION AND FAITH AT THE FEET** of the Saviour, and acknowledge in him the fulfilment of the divine predictions; acknowledge in him the overwhelming demonstration of superhuman prescience and power; acknowledge in him the accomplishment of prophecy, and the establishment of the divine authority of the religion which he introduced.

II. If you ask for a **CONTRAST** to all this plain interpretation of prophecy in the person of Christ, and to all these offices of grace discharged by him, look to the subterfuges of the Jews in evading the application of their own sacred word to our blessed



Lord; and to the false Christs by whom they have been so often deceived. See their ancient doctors admitting all the chief predictions to belong to the Messiah, and the modern ones denying such an use. Hear them prohibiting the reading of the prediction of our Lord's passion in Isaiah; and denouncing a curse on those who compute the years of Daniel. Examine, if your patience can endure the trial, the childish follies which they produce as explanations of our noblest evangelical oracles. And when this part of the contrast has raised and set forth the brightness of the sacred predictions as unequivocally accomplished in Jesus our Lord; then turn to the false Christs who in different ages have arisen to delude and destroy those who refused Jesus as their true Messiah. Remember, the very time when these wretched impostors began to appear, marked out that the fulness of the predicted period was come, and proclaimed with a loud voice, that the weeks of Daniel were run out, and that the Messiah had actually appeared. Before this period, no pretender arose. After the rejection of our Lord, crowds of the basest false prophets obtained attention. This we shall have to notice in the next part of this lecture. But I observe the fact here, that the contrast, by its deep gloom, may serve to set forth the genuine characters of truth and grace which mark every step of our Redeemer's life, every part of his miraculous works, and every word that proceeded out of his mouth. Like all the other branches of the evidences of the gospel, truth stands out boldly and alone. There is nothing second or similar to it. It is unequalled and unmingled. It meets the sincere inquirer, and commends itself to his reason, his conscience, all the affections of his soul.

III. Let us make the only true use of this part of our subject, by **IMPLORING OF OUR LORD THE SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS** which he is dispensing. Let us

not stop in acknowledging the accomplishment of predictions, and confessing our belief in the mission of our Lord Christ. Let us rely upon him as our Saviour, let us seek pardon and reconciliation at his hands, let us beseech him to be our Teacher, our Master, our Intercessor, not only by the general instructions of his word and his ministers, but by the special communications of his grace, by his merciful answers to our prayers, by the influence of his Holy Spirit upon our hearts, by his supplies of power and wisdom under temptation, and his mighty succour in the seasons of difficulty. Thus shall we understand all the fulness of his name and offices. Thus shall we know him as our King and our Lord. Thus shall we look forward with joy to his second coming to judge the world, assured that he will then most completely fulfil all the import of his spiritual titles and functions, "and receive us to himself, that where he is, there we may be also."

## LECTURE IX.

### THE FULFILMENT OF PROPHECY.

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#### PART II.

HAVING shown the most exact and surprising accomplishment of prophecy in the person and kingdom of our Lord, we come now, as we proposed, to consider the fulfilment of it in events which relate to the Jewish and Christian Church.

In doing this, we shall direct your attention to the DESTRUCTION OF THE CITY AND POLITY OF THE JEWS, and their dispersion throughout the world—to VARIOUS CITIES, NATIONS, AND EMPIRES connected at different times with the Jewish and Christian Dispensations—to the APOSTACIES of the latter days—and to the future conversion of the world, and the FINAL TRIUMPH of holiness and truth. In other words, to the history of mankind, as connected with the designs of redemption, from the earliest ages of the world to the present day—a series of accomplishments answering in extent and magnificence to all that scheme of prophecy which we reviewed in a former lecture.

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I. We call your attention to our Lord's prophecy of THE DESTRUCTION OF THE CITY AND POLITY OF THE JEWS, AND THE DISPERSION of that favoured people.

This prediction is the most memorable in the whole Scriptures, next to the prophecies which we have been considering, relative to the immediate person and mission of the Messiah.

1. The manner of our Lord's introducing the prophecy is the most striking imaginable. As he was going out of the temple, his disciples began, quite accidentally, as we speak, to "show him how it was adorned with goodly stones and gifts;" and one of them, smitten it should appear with unusual admiration, exclaimed, "Master, see what manner of stones, and what buildings are here." To this remark our Lord immediately, and without premeditation, as one in whom the fulness of the prophetic spirit dwelt, replied, "See ye not all these great buildings? Verily I say unto you, the days will come, in the which there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down."<sup>1</sup> Thus pointing out at once, in a single sentence, without the least preparation, circumlocution, or hesitation, the most prominent feature in the whole calamity, and one by which the truth of his predictions might be submitted in after ages to the examination of every human being. Yet no fact could be more improbable at the time. The Jews were in perfect peace; they enjoyed the protection, as they were under the authority, of the Roman empire, then in the height of its power. And when reverses occurred, the Romans made it their boast that they preserved the monuments of the arts.

The temple of which Jesus thus speaks, was the glory of the Jewish nation, and the admiration of the

<sup>1</sup> Matth. xxiv. 1, 2; Mark xiii. 1, 2; Luke xxi. 6.

world. During forty-six years had Herod been engaged in rebuilding it. He employed upon it one hundred and sixty-three thousand three hundred workmen. Its area was seven hundred and fifty square feet. The height of the tower on the south front was above eight hundred feet from the valley from which it was reared. The amazing size of the stones, of the finest white marble, some of them of the magnitude of sixty-five feet in length, eight in height, with a width of ten feet, added incomparably to its splendour. The front of the sacred edifice was entirely covered with sheets of gold, which, at the first rising of the sun, reflected so great a lustre, that it compelled the beholder to turn away his eyes; whilst the unrivalled whiteness of the structure in the mass, made it assume, at a distance, the appearance of a mountain of snow. And yet the denunciation of our Lord was afterwards so literally accomplished, that its very foundations were dug up by the Roman soldiers.

2. But this was only an introduction to the entire prophecy: for the disciples soon after "came to Jesus privately, as he sat on the Mount of Olives"—from which mount so "commanding is the view of Jerusalem, that the eye roams over all the streets and around the walls, as if in the survey of a plan, or model of the city."<sup>2</sup> On this mountain, with the temple in all its majesty full in view, on the very spot on which Titus afterwards pitched his camp, and whence our Lord had descended a few days before, weeping over the city—on this spot the disciples asked him "what should be the time, and what the signs" of the event he had foretold.

Jesus then began to give various distinct pre-intimations of the calamity, the accomplishment of every one of which presages was most accurate—"the wars and rumours of wars, the famines and earthquakes,

<sup>2</sup> Clarke apud Wilkins, p. 52.

the propagation of the gospel throughout the world, the persecution of Christians, the preservation of the elect, and the shortening of the days for their sake, the treachery of many, and the declining piety of more, the wonders in the sun, and moon, and stars, the false Christs, and the false prophets."—On these we need not dwell.

3. The excess of tribulation in the siege itself, was next predicted, in terms which were so minutely fulfilled, that the heart sinks at the recollection. "These be the days of vengeance," said our Lord, (referring to the threatenings delivered fifteen hundred years before by Moses, at the very establishment of his dispensation, and thus showing that accumulated prophetic inspiration, which we have already observed in our Lord's manner of expounding and enlarging the ancient predictions,) "that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe to them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days—for in those days shall be great tribulation, such as was not from the beginning of the creation which God created, unto this time; no, nor ever shall be." And history cannot furnish a parallel to the miseries then suffered by the Jews. Josephus asserts, almost in the words of our Saviour, "that if the misfortunes of all from the beginning of the world were compared with those of the Jews, they would appear much inferior." The number that perished in the siege was one million three hundred and fifty-seven thousand six hundred and sixty. The prisoners were ninety-seven thousand. The sufferings and miseries arising from the factions and divisions amongst themselves, and from the pressure of famine, were inconceivable. Parents snatched the food from their infant offspring; houses were full of women and children, perishing by famine; the bare supposition that food was in the possession of any one, created the most sanguinary conflicts; mothers,

losing every sentiment of affection, forced away the sustenance from their infants, even when they lay expiring in their arms, and no sooner had they robbed them, than they themselves were plundered of their prey ; women were dragged by the hair of their heads, for attempting to conceal any article of food ; a maddening frenzy seized the people, and led them to the commission of acts, at the mention of which humanity stands aghast. One noble lady was detected in concealing the remains of her own sucking child, which, under the miseries of the dire famine, she had actually boiled for food !

4. But Jesus does not stop here ; he proceeds to mark various circumstances which should take place in the progress of the siege, which display still more distinctly his divine prescience. “ When ye shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place—then let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains.” This warning the Christians obeyed. As the Roman armies advanced to compass the city, they fled to Pella, and not one of them, so far as we hear, perished. The heathen foe, with their idolatrous ensigns and images, which they brought into the temple, and placed over the eastern gate, and to which they sacrificed, is most accurately described as the “ abomination of desolation ;” whilst the reference in this expression to the prophecy of Daniel, connects our Lord’s prediction with that part of the Old Testament revelation, as his former references did with the predictions of Moses.

Another peculiar feature at the siege was depicted thus : “ Thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side ;” which was also exactly fulfilled, though a thing in itself highly improbable, and only adopted by Titus with great reluctance. The length of the wall

which he threw round the city, was nearly five English miles ; and it was completed in only three days, by the extraordinary exertions of the whole army.

Again, our Saviour declared that the " false Christs" which should " arise, and deceive many," should lead the people into " the desert, and the secret chamber ;"—places in themselves the most unlikely that can be conceived ; and yet we read in Josephus, that many of the false Christs betrayed their followers into the desert, where they were destroyed ; and that in the last extremities of the siege, an impostor assembled six thousand persons in a chamber or gallery of the temple, with an assurance of protection, where every one miserably perished, by the Romans setting fire to the place, contrary to the wishes of their general.

5. Our Lord next predicts the final overthrow of the Jewish city and state, under the well-known prophetic terms of the " sun being darkened, and the moon not giving her light, and the stars falling from heaven, and the powers of the heavens being shaken ;" which was but too lamentably fulfilled. The city was taken, the temple destroyed, the Jewish nation and polity terminated, a visible end put to the whole Mosaic economy, and the signal vengeance of Almighty God inflicted for the greatest moral crime ever committed by a people, the ungrateful and wilful rejection and murder of their long-promised Messiah.

6. The time was further fixed by our Saviour in the most express terms, for the fulfilment of all these calamities, " Verily, I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." And, accordingly, every one of these events, improbable as they were, did take place within forty years after our Lord uttered the denunciation. The Jewish war broke out in May A. D. 66 ; in July A. D. 70, the sacrifice and oblation ceased ; and in the



September of that year, the city was taken and destroyed.

7. The indications of a divine hand in the fulfilment of these predictions were evident, not only in the fall of Jerusalem, but in several remarkable circumstances connected with the siege itself, the conduct of the Jews, and the character of the historian who records the history of the events. Titus, the Roman general, was celebrated for his humanity; he carried on the war with reluctance, he offered repeatedly terms of amity to the besieged; he controlled, so far as he could, the fury of the soldiers; and used every effort to preserve the temple. But the Jews themselves set fire to the portico, and a soldier, "neither waiting for any command, nor trembling for such an attempt," says Josephus, "but urged on by a certain divine inspiration, threw a burning brand in at the golden window, and thereby set fire to the buildings of the temple itself." Titus, moreover, spared three towers which had been built by Herod, as a mark of what Providence had accomplished, using these remarkable words to Josephus, "It is under the conduct of God that we have waged the war: it is God who has driven out the Jews from these fortresses, against which human force and engines of war could do nothing."

The blind infatuation of the Jews, again, contributed mainly to the catastrophe. Three parties within the walls raged against each other—mutual slaughter took place—all subordination and discipline were spurned—the offers of Titus were rejected—and the Romans were forced, as it were, to extremities.

It is observable, also, that the wilful and obstinate rejection of their Messiah, and the rejection of him, partly on the very ground of his not appearing as a champion of their political independence, brought on the war and the destruction of their city. For the Jews were led to rebel against the Romans by the ex-

pectations raised by false Christs and false prophets, who undertook to rescue them from the Roman yoke; and the same punishment which had been inflicted upon their Messiah, the Romans most awfully visited upon them. They had crucified Jesus before the walls of Jerusalem; and before the same walls they themselves were crucified by the Romans in such numbers, that room was wanting for the crosses, and crosses for the bodies. "GOD HAD BLINDED THEIR MINDS," says Josephus expressly, "for the transgressions of which they had been guilty."

It is extremely remarkable, that the record of the siege should have been preserved by Josephus, a Jewish historian: and yet more so, that the narrative of it given by him, should be more minutely circumstantial, and more spread out into detail, than the account of any siege that we have in ancient history. It should seem, therefore, as if this historian (a Jew, be it noted, and continuing such to his death) was purposely raised up by Providence to witness this memorable event, and verify, to the satisfaction of the most incredulous, the fulfilment of our Saviour's predictions. Such are the incontestable marks of a divine foreknowledge in this minute and awful prediction.

The splendid arch which was erected at Rome in honour of the triumph of Titus, remains to the present day. The inscription records that "Titus had subdued the Jewish nation, and destroyed the city of Jerusalem, which all other generals, kings, and nations, had either never tried, or had tried in vain." The triumphal procession represented in bass-relief on one of the sides of the arch, exhibits the golden candlestick, the table of the shew-bread, the trumpets, and other spoils taken from the temple. Several coins were struck in commemoration of the conquest, many of which are extant. One, which I had for a time in my possession, of brass, exhibits on the obverse the

effigies of the Emperor Vespasian, and on the reverse a personification of the state, represented, as Addison observes, as a woman in sorrow, at the foot of a palm-tree, sitting upon the ground, as in a passage of the prophet that foretells her captivity, with this legend, *JUDÆA CAPTA*. On another, the legend round the same disconsolate "widowed queen," is, *VICISTI CÆSAR*.

8. But we are far from having come to the close of this wonderful prophecy. Our Lord, as if he would yet further enlarge the proof of his divine foreknowledge, and confirm the truth of his mission, added a denunciation, of the progressive fulfilment, of which we are eye-witnesses, under circumstances of advantage, to the present day. "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles shall be fulfilled—Behold, your house is left unto you desolate." The expression, "the times of the Gentiles," is known, from similar ones in the prophecies, to import the full conversion of the heathen nations. Accordingly, Jerusalem, during the lapse of seventeen or eighteen hundred years, has never been in the possession of the Jews, but constantly under the dominion of the Gentiles, and by them literally trodden under foot. A late traveller<sup>3</sup> states, that no expression could so graphically paint the condition of abject scorn and misery in which the city now lies, as that chosen by our Lord. The Romans, Saracens, Franks, Mamalukes, and, since the sixteenth century, the Turks, have in succession trodden it down and oppressed it. Attempts have not, indeed, been wanting to restore Jerusalem. Under the Emperor Adrian, (A. D. 117—138,) the Jews rose in rebellion, and attempted to recover their lost sacred metropolis, but they were subdued with immense slaughter. A temple to Jupiter was erected on Mount Cal-

<sup>3</sup> Jowett's Researches.

vary, a statue of Adonis in the manger of Bethlehem, and the images of swine, were engraven on the gates of Jerusalem. The Jews were forbidden even to approach within sight of the city.

In the fourth century a daring enterprise was undertaken by the apostate Emperor Julian to rebuild the temple, and reinstate the Jews. A public avowal of the design was made. The principal Jews were called together from all quarters. The execution was committed to Alypius, a favourite of the Emperor. Funds were supplied from the imperial treasures. All Christendom was awake to this open attempt to defeat the divine prophecy. And what was the issue of the contest between the truth of God and the impiety of man? The projected work was interrupted.<sup>4</sup> Balls of fire bursting forth from the foundations with frequent and reiterated attacks, rendered the spot inaccessible to the scorched and blasted workmen, and the attempt was renounced. Can any thing mark more visibly the foreknowledge of our Lord?

9. But an additional particular of yet greater moment is to be noticed. Our Saviour predicts the dis-

. 4 The record of this fact is in Ammianus Marcellinus, a heathen historian of undoubted credit, who held several honourable military commands under different emperors, and was a great admirer of Julian. The contemporary Christian writers affirm that it was in the mouths of all men, and was not denied even by the atheists themselves. "If it seem yet incredible to any one," say they, "he may repair both to the witnesses of it yet living, and to them who have heard it from their mouths; yea, they may view the foundations, lying yet bare and naked." Bishop Warburton has incontestably established the truth of this fact; and even Gibbon, with his usual inconsistency, acknowledges that it is attested by contemporary and respectable evidence. Whether a miraculous power was exerted, need not be determined; the interruption and cessation of the attempt at such a crisis and after such preparations, mark the unquestionable hand of God.

persion of the Jews, and yet their preservation as a distinct people—"They shall be led away captive unto all nations." This threatening joins on with those delivered by the various prophets of the Old Testament, and is another of those connecting links which increase exceedingly the proof of the prophetic inspiration. Moses and Isaiah had declared that the Jews should be "plucked off from their land—be removed to all the kingdoms of the earth—should find no ease, neither should the sole of their foot have rest—should be only oppressed and cursed always—should be mad for the sight of their eyes—should become an astonishment, a proverb, and a bye-word—that their cities should be wasted without inhabitants, and their houses without man, and their land be utterly desolate—that upon it should come up thorns and briers—and that then should the land enjoy her sabbaths, as long as it lay desolate, and they were in their enemies' land."

And have not these predictions been wonderfully fulfilled for more than seventeen hundred years? And are they not now fulfilled before your eyes? Are not the Jews dispersed over the world? Is not their name a proverb? Have not all nations vilified, persecuted, and oppressed them? Are not the Jews at this day an astonishment and a bye-word? Are they not even obliged, in many places, where they are tolerated, to live in a separate quarter, and wear some badge of degradation?<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> This was formerly the case in London, and is now so in Frankfort and elsewhere. In Rome their privileges have lately been curtailed, and they are compelled to reside in a particular quarter. Of course, I do not for an instant palliate or excuse the injustice and criminality of the conduct of Christians towards the unhappy Jews. The secret will of God in overruling events is one thing; the law of our actions another. The express moral commandments of the Almighty are our only guide. So in other fulfilments of prophecy, to

And is not their once fruitful land barren and desolate? "From the centre of the elevation about Jerusalem," says a recent traveller, "is seen a wild rugged, and mountainous desert; no herds depasturing on the summit; no forests clothing the acclivities; no water flowing through the valleys; but one rude scene of savage, melancholy waste, in the midst of which the ancient glory of Judea bows her head in widowed desolation."<sup>6</sup>

Still it was further declared, that the Jews should not be lost among the nations, but should remain a distinct and separate people. "When they be in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly. I will make a full end of the nations, whither I have driven them; but I will not make a full end of thee." And, surely, the preservation of the Jews as a distinct people, notwithstanding their dispersion for seventeen hundred years, is a remarkable and altogether unparalleled proof of the truth of our Lord's predictions. It is not only an event in fulfilment of prophecy, but an event involving a supernatural agency; an event contrary to the uniform course of human affairs; an event in which there is a permanent suspension of all the laws of our social being. That they should continue for so many ages scattered and dispersed, pursued and reviled, oppressed and persecuted; yet neither worn out by this usage, nor induced by it to renounce their religion---that neither time nor custom nor sufferings should overcome their attachment to it; but that they should still subsist a numerous, a

which we shall presently come. The guilt of man is not lessened in his particular actions, because it pleases God, in a mysterious manner, to accomplish his predictions in the various occurrences of the world. This is so clear a distinction, that perhaps it need scarcely be noticed.

<sup>6</sup> Jolliffe apud Keith.

distinct, a wretched people, the librarians of the very prophecies which condemn them, and the unconscious witnesses, wherever they rove, of the truth of the Scriptures, has something in it so prodigious, as to shut up and conclude the proof of the prophetic inspiration. And when connected with our Lord's repeated prediction of the very judicial blindness, under which we behold them suffering, constitutes an irresistible evidence of the truth of Christianity.

The whole of this series of prophecies, indeed, as to the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jews, is so broad and unambiguous in its main features, so numerous and distinct in its details, so minute in many of its parts, combines events so utterly improbable when it was delivered, is so defined as to the time of its accomplishment, was fulfilled by persons so unlikely to concur in such transactions, is connected with so many events now fulfilling in the world—it looked back to so many prophecies of the Old Testament, and looked forward to so many ages of modern history, during which it has continued to receive its accomplishment—and is so incontestably confirmed by the very attempts made to defeat it, and especially by the mysterious, and, except on the hypothesis of the truth of the Scriptures, the unaccountable state of the Jews before our eyes in the present day—as to constitute altogether an evidence which has never failed to overwhelm with conviction the mind of every sincere and candid inquirer; it raises the argument in favour of Christianity to the highest point of moral demonstration. It can be explained away by no fortuitous circumstances, it admits of no evasion, it stands forth a palpable, bold, unequivocal monument of the divine prescience of our Lord, and of the truth of the Christian religion.

It is for this reason that I have dwelt the longer upon this first branch of the fulfilment of prophecy.

Our remaining examples must be considered with greater brevity ; for we still have other points of high importance to produce.

The scheme of scriptural prophecy extends, as we observed, over the whole surface of the history of the Jewish and Christian Churches, and the nations connected with them. But I shall confine myself to the accomplishment of it in those events which remain still open to the inspection of mankind. I omit, therefore, all the prophecies which were delivered by the patriarchs. I omit the various predictions in the times of the Judges and Kings of Israel. I pass by those numerous prescient descriptions of the nations adjoining the Holy Land of the Jews ; and many relating to that extraordinary people themselves.

I proceed, therefore, to select,

**II. The accomplishment of prophecies relating to VARIOUS CITIES, NATIONS, AND EMPIRES OF THE WORLD, as connected with the designs of God in the development of the great work of redemption, and now submitted to the examination of mankind.**

1. I speak first of cities. I will not dwell on the well-known prophecies relating to Nineveh and Tyre. It is sufficient for me to ask, Where is their former grandeur, power, riches ? I ask, who it was that declared that “an utter end” should be made of Nineveh, “that exceeding great city of three days’ journey ?” I ask, who said of Tyre, once the most celebrated of the cities of Phœnicia, and the ancient emporium of the world—of whose colonies Carthage, the rival of Rome, was one ;—whose “merchants were princes, and her traffickers the honourable of the earth ;” which sat as a queen in the midst of the seas—I ask, who it was that said of her, “I will lay thy stones and thy timber and thy dust in the midst of the waters—I will make her like the top of a rock—it

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shall be a place for the spreading of nets in the midst of the sea?" I ask, who it is that has accomplished these denunciations with an exactness so unerring, that the very site of Nineveh is unknown; while that of Tyre just preserves the marks imprinted on her by the prophetic word. She is "a rock, whereon fishers dry their nets."<sup>7</sup> "The whole village of Tyre contains now only fifty or sixty poor families," says a modern traveller, afterwards a leader of the French infidelity, "who live obscurely on the produce of their little ground, and a trifling fishery—their houses are wretched huts, ready to crumble into ruins."<sup>8</sup>

I pass on to Babylon. Of its glory, of its walls and hanging gardens, of its palace and temple of Belus, of its lakes and embankments, I will not speak. But I will ask, who predicted by name, more than a century and a half before his birth, Cyrus, the conqueror of this haughty city, the deliverer of the Jews, and the monarch that issued the decree for rebuilding the temple? I ask, who foretold the very plan which he adopted for effecting his purpose? Who spake of the "two-barred gates, and the gates of brass not being shut;" of the "drying up of the river;" of the "might of the defenders failing them;" of the "posts running one to meet another to show the king of Babylon that his city was taken at one end;" of the "heat of the feasts and the drunken, and their perpetual sleep?" Let history tell. Let the same profane historians,<sup>9</sup> who record her riches and her glory, relate the account of her subjugation. The divine books condescend neither to the one nor the other. It is not there I learn the particulars either of her greatness or of her fall. But the prophetic word gives me the key to the profane history, and furnishes me with an unanswerable proof of the fulfilment of its denunciations. It does more. It tells me that the

<sup>7</sup> The very words of Bruce.

<sup>8</sup> Volney ap. Keith.

<sup>9</sup> Herodotus and Xenophon.

same events which fulfilled the sacred predictions, served also to punish the pride and impiety of the monarch of Babylon, in bringing out the sacred vessels of gold and silver for the purpose of insulting the majesty of the God of heaven. It tells me that the very night of Belshazzar's impious feast was the instant of his fall. It points out to me, not only an omniscient God fulfilling his word, but a sovereign Judge vindicating his righteousness. It does more. It tells me that these same events provided for the fulfilment of the prophecies respecting the termination of the seventy years' captivity of his people, and gave a pledge of that greater redemption from spiritual bondage, and that greater overthrow of the mystical Babylon, which belong to the New Testament history.

But the prophecy stops not here. The scriptures foretel its perpetual desolation—that "the Arabian should not pitch his tent there; but that the wild beasts should dwell there; and the houses be filled with doleful creatures, and the owls, and the satyrs dance there;" that it should be made "a possession for the bittern, and pools of water, and be swept with the besom of destruction." And how has the fact corresponded with these predictions? Its destruction has been advancing in every age, from the time of the capture of it by Cyrus, to the present hour. In the fourth century it was reduced to a great desert, its walls forming an enclosure for wild beasts. Its actual state, as described by the latest travellers, answers to the very words of the prophets delivered two thousand five hundred years ago. It is one heap of ruins, the most conspicuous of which is called Monkelibeh, or the Overturned;<sup>10</sup> whilst the lakes of stagnant water amidst its masses of dilapidated buildings, and the arid sun-burnt mounds which arise above them, exactly

<sup>10</sup> Rich's Memoirs.

fulfil the apparently irreconcilable predictions, that it should become "pools of water;" and yet be a "wilderness, a dry land, and a desert."

2. But from single cities, however remarkable, I turn to nations, and ask you to look at the graphical description given of the descendants of Ishmael by the pen of prophecy. His descendants, the Arabs, have been in every age, and are still, what it was foretold they should be, a wild and unsubdued people, an uncivilized and independent nation, whose trade is plunder, who retain their habits of hostility towards all the rest of the human race, though for three hundred years the greatest part of the whole temperate zone was included within the limits of the Mahometan conquests. "He shall be a wild man," says the word of prophecy, "his hand shall be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren." And yet, adds the same prophetic spirit, "I will make him fruitful, and multiply him exceedingly, and I will make him a great nation." Well may a sensible writer observe, that the continuance of this acute and active people, in their pristine fierceness, though surrounded for ages by polished and luxurious nations—for the Arabian is still found, from his earliest to his latest time, "a wild man," unsubdued and unchangeable, and "dwelling in the presence of all his brethren," as we may truly term the nations around him—is indeed a standing miracle.<sup>11</sup>

But doth the present state of the Egyptians less distinctly confirm the ancient prophecies? "It shall be the basest of kingdoms, neither shall it exalt itself any more among the nations; there shall be no prince of the land of Egypt; the sceptre of Egypt shall pass away." Such was the voice of the divine oracle, uttered at a time when Egypt was one of the mightiest

<sup>11</sup> Porter ap. Keith.

of the kingdoms of the globe, and no more likely to be a degraded nation, than the loftiest of the present powers of the earth. No nation ever erected such durable monuments of the arts. No country numbered so long a catalogue of kings. Its learning was proverbial. The population of its cities and of its country, as recorded by ancient historians, almost surpass belief. It was the granary of the world, the cradle of science. But now for more than two thousand years has it been sinking into degradation. During all that time, every endeavour to emancipate it, and fix a prince in it, has failed. Of a late attempt all Europe was witness. It is thus that in the silent march of events, unnoticed perhaps by politicians and philosophers, the hand of Providence accomplishes its own purposes.<sup>12</sup>

3. From nations, let us pass on to those surprising sketches of the vast divisions of the world, as connected with the church, which the pen of inspiration has drawn, and which the history of all ages has been filling up. I select two, one in the patriarchal age, the other in the time of the captivity.

“Cursed be Canaan,” said the patriarch Noah; “a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren—Blessed be the Lord God of Shem, and Canaan shall be his servant—God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem, and Canaan shall be his servant.”

Into what history can we look without seeing traces of the fulfilment of this prophecy? I see the guilty Canaanites yielding their country to Joshua. I see the Phœnicians first, and then the Carthaginians, subdued by the Greeks and Romans, the hosts of

<sup>12</sup> Gibbon and Volney speak without reserve of the degradation of Egypt. I need not say that I allude in the above sentence, to the attempt of the French under Napoleon Bonaparte to conquer Egypt, and erect it into a great nation.

Japheth. I sigh over the ills of Africa, peopled with the descendants of Canaan, which has been desolated for so many ages by the Romans, Saracens, and Turks, and, for the last two hundred years, by the abhorred traffic in human flesh.<sup>13</sup>

But I turn from this scene, to "bless the Lord God of Shem," who gave the promises to Abraham and his seed, and through him to the world; who made his land and descendants the seat of religion, the nursery of the church, the spot where the Saviour was born, and whence the gospel was first promulgated.

Still I see that "God has enlarged Japheth" beyond either Canaan or Shem. Above half of the human race has descended from his loins. For centuries, arts and science and civilization and religion have taken up their abode amongst his posterity. "He has dwelt in the tents of Shem"—receiving the gospel from his race,<sup>14</sup> obtaining that dominion, under the Greek and Roman empires, which the descendants of Shem for a long time chiefly possessed—and holding in these later times the largest and most valuable countries of the east, as colonists and merchants, abiding in the tents of another people.

But I must advert, for a moment, to that more detailed geographical and chronological chart of the empires of the world, traced out by the hand of the prophet Daniel almost eighteen hundred years after the prediction of Noah. You know the portentous image which the inspired prophet describes. You

<sup>13</sup> Undoubtedly, so long as any remains of this trade are unlawfully and unjustly cherished in the West Indies, it will continue to be the foulest disgrace to Christendom, and to the British nation, that ever marked the enlightened countries of Europe. The law of God, not prophecy, is the rule of our conduct.

<sup>14</sup> The principal success of the gospel, in the calling of the Gentiles, has hitherto been amongst the descendants of Japheth.

now "the head of gold," representing the empire then existing, the Babylonian—"the breast and arms of silver," the Medo-Persian, which succeeded it, on that conquest of Babylon under Cyrus, to which we have just adverted—"the belly and thighs of brass," the Macedonian under Alexander and his successors—"the legs of iron, and feet part of iron and part of clay," the Roman empire which subdued the Macedonian, and which, in the sixth century of the Christian æra, was dismembered into ten kingdoms. "The kingdom of the stone cut out without hands" is exounded, as you remember, by the prophet himself, of that spiritual and heavenly dispensation to be established by "the Son of Man," and which proceeding by mild, and, to our wisdom, feeble means, resembled a stone cut out without human skill; but which, in its progress, is destined to "smite the feet of iron and clay, and break them to pieces, and fill the whole earth."

Can any thing give an adequate idea of the magnificence of the divine inspiration in these rapid delineations of all the revolutions of the world during all ages; especially when considered in contrast with those minute details of the overthrow and abiding state of separate cities? The mind is lost in the contemplation of the foreknowledge of God.

But I proceed to notice, what is connected with the last topic,

### III. The predictions OF THE APOSTACIES OF THE LATTER DAYS.

For it is impossible to look back to the history of the church, without seeing the lamentable departures from the pure faith and obedience of the gospel which have prevailed for so many ages. In the east, the seventh century saw the impostor Mahomet infatuate with his delusion the inhabitants of the fairest portion of Christendom; whilst in the west, a gross

corruption of the doctrines and precepts of the gospel darkened the glory of Christianity. Nor does any thing more afflict the mind of the sincere Christian, or open a wider door to the objections of the unbeliever, than the perversions of the doctrine of the Christian church. Under the pressure of such considerations, it is an extraordinary relief to turn to the word of prophecy, and see the predictions of these very apostacies, delivered many centuries before they took place.

I dwell not on the features of the eastern antichrist, as painted in the book of Daniel, and the kindred language of St. John, because I hasten to notice what more immediately presents itself before our eyes, the great western apostacy. Let us first see how it is delineated by the prophetic pencil of Daniel. We there find it set forth as a seducing power, that was to arise after the conversion, downfall, and division into ten sovereignties of the fourth, or Roman empire—little, in comparison of these others as to secular authority, but claiming and obtaining an universal spiritual authority over the body of the western kingdom,—acquiring and maintaining this through policy and craft, procuring a voluntary surrender of power from really superior sovereigns, and using it to become a leader to others in apostacy, persecution, and various kinds of opposition to the truth.<sup>15</sup>


With these criteria, I compare St. Paul's description in the New Testament of the apostacy, or falling away, when "the man of sin should be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God; whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteous-

<sup>15</sup> Daniel vii. 19—25.

ness in them that perish—God sending them a strong delusion, that they should believe a lie. The mystery of iniquity," adds the apostle, "doth already work; only, he who now letteth, will let, until he be taken out of the way." In this delineation, I find the same distinctive features as in the description of the prophet, with the additional marks of blasphemous usurpation of the place and authority of God—a mystery of iniquity, which was already insinuating itself when the apostle wrote, but which was let or hindered, by the jealous authority of the Roman empire, united then under one potent government; but which would be revealed when the downfall and dismemberment of that empire should remove the obstacle to its development.

The same great apostle resumes the subject in his first epistle to Timothy, and foretels that in "the latter time, some should depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils, speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats"—particulars all falling under the same heads as those before enumerated.

We next come to the closing visions of prophecy in the Revelation of St. John, and, lo, a delineation of the same corruption as in the prophet, the same times assigned to it, the same geographical and chronological position in the map of prophecy—all leading to the confirmation of our previous notices, and adding many other decisive indications. The apostacy is here described as a power having a mouth speaking great things, and even blasphemies: it makes war with the saints; it has horns like a lamb, but speaks as a dragon; it doth great wonders, and deceiveth those that dwell on the earth. It is called "Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots, and Abominations of the Earth." It is further depicted as a





sorceress, "decked in purple, and scarlet, and gold, and precious stones, and pearls; drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus"—working by other governments, who "agree to give unto her their strength and power"—and thus becoming the fountain head of corruption; and inducing the "kings of the earth to commit fornication with her." Moreover, the place is now absolutely fixed, "the city of the seven mountains; the great city, that reigneth over the kings of the earth"—the head of the fourth empire. The time also is more expressly limited to the period when the dismembered kingdoms of the Roman empire agree to give their power into her hands. The duration also, is defined to be twelve hundred and sixty prophetic days, or years—a period already assigned in the book of Daniel, and confirmed in the Revelation, by six or seven declarations.

What spiritual power it was, that arose in the city of Rome after the fall of the empire, uniting in itself all these marks and indications, I need not tell you. Let the corruptions of doctrine and precept, the usurpation of the rights of conscience, the prohibition of the free use of the scriptures, the establishment of a spiritual idolatry, the principle of working by craft, meretricious splendour, and religious delusion—"THE ENERGY OF ERROR," as the apostle terms it<sup>16</sup>—together with the persecutions which characterized for so many centuries the church and bishop of Rome, expound the divine prophecies.

Such a combination of tokens, verified before our eyes in an APOSTACY, which has existed unchanged in all its characters for nearly twelve centuries, is a proof of prophetic inspiration of the most illustrious kind; at the same time that it explains and develops the mystery of the divine Providence, which the actual state

<sup>16</sup> 2 Thess. ii. 11.

of Christendom exhibits—nay, it turns a most painful and oppressive view of the declension of the church, into a stronger confirmation of the Christian's faith.

But, I pause : for surely the combined force of these branches of the fulfilment of prophecy, overwhelms the mind. Each division strengthens the rest : they embrace not matters of curiosity, but subjects in which the highest interests of revelation are concerned. Under the first head, the prophecies of the Messiah, we see the Christian dispensation established. Under the second, the predictions concerning the Jewish and Christian churches, we see, so far as we have hitherto gone, the designs of God, as to the progress of redemption, developed. We behold the Jewish people cast into exile—the cities and nations of the world exhibited in their connexion with the church, and the providence of God displayed in all the revolutions of empire—and the Christian church desolated by spiritual judgments for its unfaithfulness to its privileges and advantages. But we must not stop here : let us add a reflection, as we proposed, on the

IVth and last branch of this second head, the prophecies OF THE FUTURE CONVERSION OF THE WORLD, AND THE FINAL TRIUMPH OF HOLINESS AND TRUTH.

For such is the consummation to which we are encouraged to look forward. “The earth is to be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.” The vail is to be removed from the heart of the Jew. The antichristian apostacies are to cease. The heathens are to be brought home to the fold of God. Jerusalem is not always to be trodden down of the Gentiles. Satan is to be “cast into the lake of fire, and to be chained, and deceive the nations no more.” Christ our Lord is to reign over all the nations of the earth ; a long and glorious period of

majesty, his omnipotence, his wisdom, his foreknowledge, his supreme providence and grace.

But I must hasten towards **THE CONCLUSION** of this branch of our subject. What mind of any candour and sincerity can hesitate on yielding to the prodigious force of this argument from prophecy? The arguments deduced from the necessities of mankind, from the authenticity and credibility of the books, and from the miracles, were in different ways most satisfactory. They were just what might be expected in the case of a revelation from the Almighty God. The argument from miracles, especially, was most conclusive. We saw and acknowledged the finger of God. But I ask any unprejudiced person, whether the prophetic argument be not still more convincing, from the accumulated riches of the divine glory apparent in it? I ask whether, if you contemplate the character and scheme of it, in its extent, the union of all its parts in the divine person and glory of our Lord, the infinite wisdom and contrivance of those parts, the characters of the prophets themselves, and the high and important moral ends to which it was and is subservient, it do not bear the impress of the prescience and power of God? I ask again, whether the divine faithfulness and truth, apparent in its accomplishment—the events of nations and empires bowing to its designs—the annals of six thousand years proclaiming the hand of Providence engaged in its inspiration and its fulfilment—I ask any unprejudiced person, whether such an exhibition of infinite foresight and omnipotent power, which is now going on and accumulating its effects in every age, do not prove the truth of that religion of which it is a prominent part? I ask, whether the correspondence which has been shown between the scheme of prophecy detailed in the last lecture, and the fulfilment of its several parts, as we have been considering it now, do not put a seal, as it were, to the divine origin of both?

And when the evidence from this whole prophetic inspiration is added to that from palpable miraculous powers—when we consider that the same persons perform the mighty works who predict the improbable and often remote events—that the same lips of Moses and the prophets, of Christ and his apostles, which uttered the several prophetic declarations, and ventured their cause on the accomplishment of them in distant ages, were those which proclaimed the doctrines of religion, and then performed the supernatural deeds which were the instant and undeniable credentials of their mission;—when all this is considered, I know not what excuse men can offer if they continue in doubt and hesitation on the truth of Christianity. The same divine glory which, in the wonders of creation, spreads before the eyes of men the proofs of “his eternal power and Godhead,” is apparent in exhibiting to them more convincing and direct evidences of his will, with like profusion and variety and magnificence, in the book of revelation, and the accomplishment of prophecy in the events of the world. The demonstration is as complete in its kind to prove the mercy of God in the incarnation of a Saviour, as is that by which his existence and wisdom and power are proved by the order and arrangement of the material world. It is as little needful that Jesus should now repeat his miracles, or deliver again his prophecies, as that the world should be a second time created.<sup>17</sup> The proof continues in each case; and, as to Christianity, increases. The miracles of the first ages of the Jewish and Christian dispensation are, in fact, propagated in the fulfilment of prophecy in every succeeding one. Men sometimes are disposed to think that if they could see a miracle wrought in their own sight, they would believe the gospel without delay, and obey it unreservedly.<sup>18</sup> They

<sup>17</sup> Franks.

<sup>18</sup> Bishop Newton.

imitate. Mahometanism is unsupported by a single prediction. The apostate western church has claimed the power of miracles---vainly indeed---but it has claimed it; but to prophecy it has never put in a pretence: and the wretched attempts of occasional enthusiasts in modern times, have only served, by their discomfiture, to mark out more clearly the boundaries between human folly and divine foreknowledge.

Here, then, the Almighty proposes to every one of us the most powerful external means of conviction. All that argument can effect on the judgment of men is in vain, if the prophetic word fail to persuade. And yet, be it well remembered, it will fail to persuade, if the heart be not sincere and humble in the investigation. A certain state of mind is, as I must again and again remind you, essential to a consideration of the Christian question. In a humble and teachable spirit, the blaze of glory bursting forth from the word of prophecy penetrates and convinces the soul---the awakened heart trembles at its former obduracy---the greatness and the wisdom of God shine forth in every step of the investigation---the person and grace of the divine Redeemer are illustrated by every fulfilment of his word. But to the prejudiced and unwilling student, to the objector and the sophist, to the immoral and the proud, to the presumptuous and self-confident, prophecy speaks in vain. The eye will hover round the dark and obscure parts, and close its view to the bright and luminous. The prophetic word especially requires that candid temper, that simplicity which our Saviour enjoins, where he says, "If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light;" which he illustrates, as I have before noted, by the example of children; and commends in the person of the guileless Nathanael; and which is mentioned, as a characteristic of the first Christian con-

verts, under the expression of "singleness of heart." They who apply themselves with such a disposition, are in that state of mind in which only they correspond with the economy of grace. In such persons the "prophetic word," whether written in the scriptures, or indicated by the events of mankind, will "have free course, and be glorified."

Let us, then, learn more and more of this heavenly temper. Let us look forward to that last solemn judgment, of which many of the divine prophecies are adumbrations and pledges,<sup>19</sup> with solemn preparation, with jealous watchfulness, with holy awe; and let us anticipate those glorious triumphs—and, as it were, advance and bring them on—which are to close the whole scheme of fulfilled prediction on earth, and to introduce and fall into, the unbroken peace and glory of the eternal abodes of heaven.

<sup>19</sup> Especially the prophecies of the destruction of Jerusalem, and of the fall of the western apostacy.

## LECTURE X.

## THE PROPAGATION OF CHRISTIANITY.

1 COR. I. 19—21, and 27—29.

*For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, I will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.*

*God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound things that are mighty. And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen; yea, and things that are not, to bring to nought things that are; that no flesh should glory in his presence.*

HAVING considered the arguments for the divine authority of the Christian religion, derived from the performance of undeniable miracles, and the numerous prophecies now fulfilling before our eyes, in the events of the world, we come next to contemplate the mani-

fest interference of Almighty God, in the establishment of Christianity, and its subsequent continuance to the present day.

This subject may be considered in the facts themselves which it embraces—and in the agreement of these facts with the predictions of our Lord and the prophets under the preceding dispensation.

The propagation and preservation of Christianity, are in themselves proofs of divine authority; but when considered as the accomplishment of a long train of previous predictions, they have a still more convincing force.

The power of God engaged in favour of Christianity, will appear, if we consider **THE PROPAGATION ITSELF—THE OBSTACLES SURMOUNTED—and the MORAL AND SPIRITUAL CHANGE** produced in the converts.

**I. Let us call your attention to THE PROPAGATION ITSELF OF CHRISTIANITY.**

1. And here, if we reflect on the singularity of the attempt to propagate any system merely religious, it will lead us to attribute the success of Christianity to a divine interference. For no religion, purely as a religion, was ever propagated, but the Christian. Heathenism was never a matter of dissemination or conversion. It had no creed, no origin distinct from the corrupt traces of a remote and fabulous antiquity. It was a creature of human mould, contrived for the sake of human legislation. The Greeks and Romans imposed it not on their subject nations. Mahometanism was the triumph of the sword. Conquest, not religious faith, was its manifest object; rapine, violence, and bloodshed, were its credentials.

No religion was ever attempted to be spread through the world by the means of instruction and persuasion, with an authority of its own, but Christianity. The idea never came into the mind of man to propagate a



religion, having for its set design and exclusive object, the enlightening of mankind with a doctrine professedly divine, till Christianity said to her disciples, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."

2. The rapidity and extent of the propagation of the gospel were such as to prove its divine origin. On the very first day of its promulgation, three thousand were converted; these soon increased to five thousand. Multitudes, both of men and women, were afterwards daily added to the new religion. Before the end of thirty years, the gospel had spread through Judæa, Galilee, Samaria, almost all the numerous districts of Lesser Asia; through Greece, and the islands of the Ægean sea, and the sea-coast of Africa, and had passed on to the capital of Italy. Great multitudes believed at Antioch in Syria, at Joppa, Ephesus, Corinth, Thessalonica, Beræa, Iconium, Derbe, Antioch in Pisidia, at Lydda and Saron. Converts also are mentioned at Tyre, Cæsarea, Troas, Athens, Philippi, Lystra, Damascus. Thus far the sacred narrative conducts us. The religion being thus widely diffused, the New Testament carries us no further. But all ecclesiastical and profane history concurs in describing the rapid progress of the new doctrine. Tacitus, Suetonius, Juvenal, Pliny, Martial, Marcus Aurelius, sufficiently testify the propagation of Christianity. To the statements of Tacitus and Pliny, we have already adverted briefly: we must now produce them more at length.

Tacitus thus writes of transactions which took place just at the time when the history in the Acts of the Apostles closes, about thirty years after the crucifixion; he is speaking of the suspicions which fell on the emperor Nero, of having caused a fire which had happened at Rome. "But neither these exertions, nor his largesses to the people, nor his offerings to the gods, did away the infamous imputation under which

Nero lay, of having ordered the city to be set on fire. To put an end therefore to this report, he laid the guilt, and inflicted the most cruel punishments upon a set of people, who were held in abhorrence for their crimes, and called by the vulgar, Christians. The founder of that name was Christ, who suffered death in the reign of Tiberius, under his procurator, Pontius Pilate. This pernicious superstition, thus checked for awhile, broke out again; and spread not only over Judea, where the evil originated, but through Rome also, whither every thing bad upon earth finds its way, and is practised. Some who confessed their sect, were first seized; and afterwards, by their information, a vast multitude were apprehended, who were convicted, not so much of the crime of burning Rome, as of hatred to mankind. Their sufferings at their execution were aggravated by insult and mockery, for some were disguised in the skins of wild beasts, and worried to death by dogs, some were crucified, and others were wrapt in pitched shirts, and set on fire when the days closed, that they might serve as lights to illuminate the night. Nero lent his own gardens for these executions; and exhibited at the same time a mock Circensian entertainment, being a spectator of the whole, in the dress of a charioteer, sometimes mingling with the crowd on foot, and sometimes viewing the spectacles from his car. This conduct made the sufferers pitied; and though they were criminals, and deserving the severest punishments, yet they were considered as sacrificed, not so much out of regard to the public good, as to gratify the cruelty of one man.”<sup>1</sup>

This passage proves that Christianity had been rapidly and extensively propagated throughout Judea, and had gained a vast multitude of converts at Rome—so many, as to attract the attention, and excite the

<sup>1</sup> Tacitus apud Paley.

jealousy and bitter hatred of the emperor. This is the use I make of the passage now: other uses will arise as we proceed.

The testimony of the younger Pliny, relates to a period about forty years after the preceding passage from Tacitus.<sup>2</sup> It assures us, that the number of culprits brought before him in that distant province, (Bithynia,) was so great, as to call for serious consultation—that the religion had spread not only through cities, but even villages, and the country—that persons of all ages and ranks, women as well as men, were seized by it as by a contagion—that the temples were almost desolate—the sacrifices nearly intermitted, and the victims could scarcely find a purchaser.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> A. D. 106 or 107.

<sup>3</sup> I insert the whole letter in the masculine translation of Milner, as affording various important information to which we shall allude as we go on. The reply of Trajan is deserving of notice, as recognizing the monstrous principle which Pliny had laid down, that the mere profession of Christianity, without any moral crime, was a sufficient ground of conviction and punishment.

*C. Pliny to Trajan, Emperor.*

“Health.—It is my usual custom, Sir, to refer all things, of which I harbour any doubts, to you. For who can better direct my judgment in its hesitation, or instruct my understanding in its ignorance? I never had the fortune to be present at any examination of Christians before I came into this province. I am therefore at a loss to determine what is the usual object either of inquiry or of punishment, and to what length either of the one is to be carried. It has also been with me a question very problematical,—whether any distinction should be made between the young and the old, the tender and the robust;—whether any room should be given for repentance, or the guilt of Christianity once incurred is not to be expiated by the most unequivocal retraction;—whether the name itself, abstracted from any flagitiousness of conduct, or the crimes connected with the name, be the object of punishment. In the meantime, this has been my method, with respect to those who were brought before me as

Tertullian and Origen, (from A. D. 130—230) describe the Christian doctrine, as “filling the cities,

Christians. I asked them, whether they were Christians : if they pleaded guilty, I interrogated them twice afresh, with a menace of capital punishment. In case of obstinate perseverance, I ordered them to be executed. For of this I had no doubt, whatever was the nature of their religion, that a sullen and obstinate inflexibility called for the vengeance of the magistrate. Some were infected with the same madness, whom, on account of their privilege of citizenship, I reserved to be sent to Rome to be referred to your tribunal. In the course of this business, informations pouring in, as is usual when they are encouraged, more cases occurred. An anonymous libel was exhibited, with a catalogue of names of persons, who yet declared, that they were not Christians then, or ever had been ; and they repeated after me an invocation of the gods and of your image, which, for this purpose I had ordered to be brought with the images of the deities : They performed sacred rites with wine and frankincense, and execrated Christ,—none of which things I am told a real Christian can ever be compelled to do. On this account I dismissed them. Others, named by an informer, first affirmed, and then denied the charge of Christianity ; declaring that they had been Christians, but had ceased to be so, some three years ago, others still longer, some even twenty years ago. All of them worshipped your image, and the statues of the gods, and also execrated Christ. And this was the account which they gave of the nature of the religion they once had professed, whether it deserves the name of crime or error,—namely, that they were accustomed on a stated day to meet before daylight, and to repeat among themselves an hymn to Christ as to a god, and to bind themselves by an oath, with an obligation of not committing any wickedness ; but on the contrary, of abstaining from thefts, robberies, and adulteries ;—also, of not violating their promise, or denying a pledge ;—after which, it was their custom to separate, and meet again at a promiscuous harmless meal, from which last practice they however desisted, after the publication of my edict, in which, agreeably to your orders, I forbade any societies of that sort. On which account, I judged it the more necessary to inquire, BY TORTURE, from two females, who were said to be deaconesses, what is the real truth. But nothing could I collect, except a depraved and excessive superstition. Deferring, therefore, any farther investigation, I determined to consult you. For the number of culprits is so great, as to call for

islands, towns, boroughs, the camp, the senate, and the forum." They state, that there was not "a nation, whether Greek or barbarian, or of any other name, even of those who wander in tribes, or live in tents, where the religion was not triumphant"—they state that "the Moors and Gætulians of Africa, the people on the coasts of Spain, several nations of France, the parts of Britain which had been inaccessible to the Romans, the Sarmatians, Dacians, Germans, and Scythians," abounded with Christians. Between seventy and eighty years after Origen, the Roman empire became Christian, under Constantine the Great (A. D. 312,) and in twenty years more Heathenism was only like a relict. Let the testimony of Jerome, about ten years after this last date, close

serious consultation. Many persons are informed against of every age, and of both sexes; and more still will be in the same situation. The contagion of the superstition hath spread not only through cities, but even villages and the country. Not that I think it impossible to check and to correct it. The success of my endeavours hitherto forbids such desponding thoughts: for the temples, once almost desolate, begin to be frequented, and the sacred solemnities, which had long been intermitted, are now attended afresh; and the sacrificial victims are now sold everywhere, which once could scarce find a purchaser. Whence I conclude, that many might be reclaimed, were the hope of impunity, on repentance, absolutely confirmed."

*Trajan to Pliny.*

"You have done perfectly right, my dear Pliny, in the inquiry which you have made concerning Christians. For truly no one general rule can be laid down, which will apply itself to all cases. These people must not be sought after:—If they are brought before you and convicted, let them be capitally punished, yet with this restriction, that if any renounce Christianity, and evidence his sincerity by supplicating our gods, however suspected he may be for the past he shall obtain pardon for the future, on his repentance. But anonymous libels in no case ought to be attended to; for the precedent would be of the worst sort, and perfectly incongruous to the maxims of my government."

this account: "Until the resurrection of Christ, 'in Judah only was God known, and his name was great in Israel.' The men of all the earth, from India to Britain, and from the cold regions of the north to the warm climates of the Atlantic Ocean, with the numberless people dwelling in that large tract, were no better than beasts, being ignorant of their Creator. But now, the passion and resurrection of Christ are celebrated in the discourses of all nations. I need not mention Jews, Greeks, and Latins. The Indians, Persians, Goths, and Egyptians, philosophize and firmly believe the immortality of the soul, and future recompenses; which before, the greatest philosophers had denied or doubted of. The fierceness of Thracians and Scythians is now softened by the gentle sound of the gospel; and everywhere "Christ is all in all."<sup>4</sup>

The question then is, whether this success does not form a triumphant argument in favour of the truth of the religion? Can it be accounted for on any other hypothesis?

3. For observe the nature of the doctrine thus propagated. It was no speculative theory, cradled in the retreats of philosophical inquiry. It was a practical and holy doctrine, demanding an entire change of heart and conduct, enforcing a pure and virtuous life, inculcating many awful and mysterious truths, and allowing of no compromise with idolatry or superstition. It taught the unity and perfection of God, the fall and alienation of man by sin, the condemnation and ruin in which he lay, the incarnation and sacrifice of Christ, the renewing influences of the Holy Spirit, the duties of prayer, faith, humility, spirituality of mind, mortification of the principles of evil in the heart, and universal purity, justice, and benevolence to our fellow-creatures. In short, it was dia-

<sup>4</sup> A. D. 342.

<sup>5</sup> Lardner V. 396.

metrically opposed to all the theories of the philosophers, and all the passions and habits of the common people amongst the heathen ; and to the pride, the fond notions of a temporal kingdom, the reliance on birth and external religious privilege, and the corruption of manners, amongst the Jews. Neither the Heathens nor Jews could understand, without a serious inquiry, the very terms chiefly used in the Christian doctrine, such as faith, righteousness, grace, salvation, the flesh and spirit, contrition, humility ;<sup>6</sup> whilst the things themselves were in contradiction to their whole intellectual associations and moral habits. Christianity was a new and spiritual religion, in a corrupt and idolatrous world. It is not the propagation of a religion merely that we have to consider, but the propagation of such a religion with such rapidity, and to such an extent as Christianity, which marks the immediate finger of God.

But, proceed we to mark more particularly,

## II. THE OBSTACLES SURMOUNTED in this rapid diffusion of Christianity.

1. The persons by whom the religion was propagated, and propagated without human aid, were feeble and unknown. For who were the first apostles of Christianity ? Were they sages of Greece and Rome, clothed with the reverence, and protected by the usages, of the nations to whom they came ? Were they philosophers or augurs ? Was it another Socrates, who proclaimed his intercourse with a guardian angel, and founded his doctrine upon the instructions of his celestial monitor ? Was it another Numa, who asserted his communication with the deity of some sacred fountain ?<sup>7</sup> No. The apostles were unaided, and for the most part unlearned, as well as unknown,

<sup>6</sup> Bp. Sumner's Reception of Christianity.

<sup>7</sup> Benson's Hulsean Lectures.

men. Of all countries which could have been selected for the origin of a religion, Judæa was the most inauspicious and improbable. The Jews were a nation contemned and hated by the whole Greek and Roman world.

And what better hope had the apostles from their own countrymen, by whom the Galileans were as much despised as the nation generally were by the Gentiles; and who saw the apostles, a poor, friendless, unconnected body, without education and without support, betrayed by their very dialect, going forth to condemn them for the crucifixion of Christ, to abolish all their ceremonies and privileges, and admit the heathen to an equality with them in the new religion.

Further, how do these despised apostles enter upon their hopeless errand? Do they begin the work by gradual insinuation, by imperceptibly introducing their religion to persons of authority and talent, by entering upon long disputations, and working their way by reasonings, confutation, and human rhetoric? Do they come down into the arena of philosophic disputation, and meet the "wise, and the scribe, and the disputer of this world," upon his own territory? Just the contrary: they proceed in a way of direct authority: they renounce all the craft and policy of former teachers; and in the simplicity and openness of truth, assert the doctrines and duties of the Christian religion, resting their whole cause on the divine aid and power.

Not only so. They had themselves no previous plan of converting the world. They had yielded to fear and pusillanimity at their Master's sufferings, they were filled with misapprehensions on the spiritual name of the gospel, they had strong prejudices against the admission of the Gentiles into the church, they cherished false expectations of a temporal, and had no preparation for a spiritual, kingdom of Messiah. Their courage and fortitude were the effects of the



descent of the Spirit. And their errors and prejudices were, at last, only dissipated by degrees, as new circumstances arose. It was, in fact, persecution which scattered them abroad, and led them to propose the gospel to the Gentiles. And yet these men subdued the world.

And observe, also, in their manner of preaching, their open appeal to the main facts of Christianity and the immediate power of the Holy Ghost. Read St. Peter's discourses to the Jews, and St. Paul's to the Gentiles. On what does the doctrine rest? Upon man, or upon God? Can anything be more artless, more unassuming, more evidently referring every thing to a divine operation, especially as to the resurrection of their Lord? How strong and unbending are their demands upon their hearers' faith and obedience? How uncompromising their condemnation of polytheism and vice, when addressing the heathen; and of the pride and misinterpretation of the prophecies, when addressing the Jews? They rely on a divine operation. Even in the records of their actions they relate only a part of their wonderful successes, and those relations are often only incidental.\* It is obvious that events as they arose, and not human design and foresight, conducted the steps of the apostles; and that the fact of the resurrection, and their miraculous powers, not human suasion, were the strength of their discourses. And with these peaceful arms they conquer. The most unlikely persons, with the most unlikely doctrine, in the most unlikely manner, convert the world! A divine interposition can alone fill up the chasm between such disproportioned means and the immense effects produced. If the resurrection of Christ were not true, if the Holy Ghost had not descended upon them, if the gifts of

\* This may be traced throughout the Acts of the Apostles. Events of immense magnitude come out incidentally. The Epistles abound with similar discoveries by intimation.

tongues and of healing had not been conferred, how could such a doctrine, in the hands of such men, have gained a single convert ?

The conclusion of Eusebius (A. D. 270—339) seems unavoidable, "When I consider," he says, "the power of this doctrine, and that great multitudes of men were persuaded, and numerous societies formed by the mean and illiterate disciples of Jesus; and that not in obscure and ignorant places, but in the most celebrated cities, in Rome itself, the queen of all other cities, in Alexandria, and Antioch, throughout Egypt and Lybia, Europe and Asia; and also in villages and country places, and in all nations; I am obliged and even compelled to inquire after the cause of this, and to acknowledge that they succeeded not in their great undertaking any otherwise than by DIVINE POWER surpassing all human ability, and by the co-operation of him who said unto them, "Go, teach all nations.""

2. And bear in mind the additional obstacles to their enterprize which arose from the time and place of the propagation of Christianity.

The time when Christianity was promulgated, was just that which would have presented the greatest obstacles to any religion that was not protected by a divine arm. The time was one of high cultivation, of literary and philosophical inquiry, of art, science, elegance, refinement, luxury, vice. It was the period when Rome, the mistress of the nations by her arms, had become their instructress by her arts and laws. It was the polished and enlightened age of Augustus, when the empire was filled with philosophers, orators, poets, and historians.

It was a time of profound peace, when the temple of Janus was shut, and all nations kept, as it were, a state of watchful silence, waiting for the appearance

of the divine person whom a universal fame pronounced would arise from the east.

It was an age the furthest removed from that credulity which distinguishes ignorant nations. It was an age of scepticism, when dislike of all religion prevailed to a great extent among the learned. The Epicurean doctrine had swallowed up all other sects; a doctrine which maintained the indifference of human actions, made pleasure the chief good, and held the cessation of existence at death. The disciples of this philosophy denied a deity, or asserted such an ideal one as remains in a state of torpor and inactivity, heedless of the concerns of this lower world. No period could be conceived so little adapted to the exhibition of a false, and so well calculated to put to the test the merits of a true religion. They had wits sharpened by curiosity, so that they would eagerly inquire after whatever was new; but at the same time they were disposed to treat with contempt that which pretended to be supernatural. They had long been accustomed to laugh at their own gods; and though they might imagine there was some safety attached to the ancient superstitions, yet in their private life and expectations, it is evident, they did not in the least connect any serious anticipation of happiness with the worship, or of punishment with the neglect, of their deities. The infinite wisdom saw fit to select this time, to silence for ever, as my text speaks, the babblings of philosophy, and to "destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." It cannot be said that Christianity stole upon the world like a thief in the night: it cannot be said that it owed its success to the credulity of mankind; and that if the generations among whom it first appeared, lived now, they would have reasoned to more purpose. For the productions of that age, are the admiration of this. In works of taste and imagination, it has never been surpassed; and it is some-

times considered as the highest praise of writers of the present day, that they exhibit a near approach to the inimitable beauties of the authors who then flourished.

It was a time, however, of infinite luxury, effeminy, and corruption of manners, as we observed in a former lecture,<sup>10</sup> when the most dissolute and relaxed standard of opinions, and the most debauched and disgusting state of public and private morals, prevailed. That is, the period was exactly that in which men would examine a new religion with a strict and even feverish suspicion, and would resist the yoke of a holy law with the greatest contempt and pertinacity.

The place also whence the doctrine arose, was just the very spot which witnessed the facts on which it rested. It was not in some distant and obscure region that the apostles first asserted the resurrection of Christ; but at Jerusalem, and at the festival which collected the most numerous assemblage of the nation. The first Christian churches were formed in Judea and Galilee, which had been the scenes of our Lord's ministry and miracles. The success of the apostles on the spot where the chief parts of the history had been transacted, could only arise from the truth of their appeals to the hearts of the witnesses, and from the accompanying power of Almighty God.

These considerations are of surprising force. A religion is established in the place where its facts occurred, and is believed by immense numbers who were capable of ascertaining the truth of them; and it then goes forth into the heart of a polished and learned world at the very height of all its secular pride and indulgence, and imposes its holy laws on the corrupt and licentious age. It triumphs by its meek and peaceful doctrine over the influence of edu-

<sup>10</sup> Lect. ii.

cation, the force of habit, the weight of authority, the craft of a corrupt priesthood, the policy of legislators, the skill and genius of poets and philosophers, the fascination of oracles and prodigies, the shafts of scorn and ridicule, and the impositions of an idolatry supported by remote antiquity, universal diffusion, and inseparable conjunction with the laws and usages and fancied prosperity of each state. Surely no man can witness the Christian faith marching forth unarmed amidst such foes, and yet victorious over them all—without being constrained to believe that a heavenly, though an invisible guard, watched over its progress; and without exclaiming, after the manner of the Roman soldier who witnessed the mysterious sufferings of its divine Author, “Truly, this religion is from God!”

3. But not only had the Christian religion to meet with these obstacles, but to meet them strengthened and supported by the fiercest persecutions. I refer again to the statements of Tacitus and Pliny adduced above. Weigh every word of those passages, and tell me the amount of fierce and unlimited persecution which raged against Christianity. But these are only specimens of the dreadful scenes which lasted for three hundred years; during which the blood of the Christian martyrs flowed in torrents in almost every part of the Roman empire. The Jew and the Gentile vied in their hatred and cruelty. He who professed this despised religion was exposed to the loss of property and country and liberty and life. The emperors armed the magistrates with authority, the fury of the populace supplied additional means of destruction, and the poison of the most odious calumnies (as we see also in the extracts to which I have just referred) aggravated all. The Christians were tortured with every species of cruelty, and accounted the enemies of the human race. Neither age nor

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<sup>10</sup> Lect. ii.

of every imaginable obstacle, and unsupported by a single human resource, if it had not been of God.

But consider,

III. THE SACRIFICES REQUIRED OF THE CHRISTIAN CONVERTS. It was no idle assent which they had to give to a philosophical speculation or an abstract theory. The reception of the doctrine, besides all the outward disruption of their previous habits, and all the personal hazards which it brought with it, demanded a new course of life, entirely in opposition to the corrupt propensities of our nature. Compare the apostle's description of the previous characters of the Roman or Corinthian or Ephesian converts; as "far from God, alienated from the divine life, resigned over to all uncleanness, the understanding blinded to truth, the heart hardened against spiritual perceptions"—with his description of the same men renewed, sanctified, elevated, united to God, having "the eyes of their understanding enlightened," beholding the "glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, walking in love," mortifying every corrupt affection, living a pure and self-denying and benevolent life;—and then tell me what but the power of God could have produced the change. What could have led the mass of the heathen world to sacrifice all their prejudices and all their lusts, in order to embrace the suffering and holy religion of a despised malefactor, unless a divine and undoubted power had attended it? What more demonstrative token of such a power, than to turn thousands of men from the practice of every vice to the practice of every virtue; to reform them in understanding, inclination, affection; to recover, what philosophy only pretended to, the dominion of reason over passion; to make them unfeignedly subject to their Maker, rejoicing in his favour in the midst of the severest sufferings, and serenely waiting for their *dismissal* into a state of blissful immortality? The

patience, especially, with which they endured the torments inflicted on them, had something in it more than human. This did not appear in a few cases merely, but was so general, and at the same time so astonishing, as to attract the notice of their persecutors, and frequently to produce submission to the doctrine which they taught.

The general meekness also and benevolence of their lives, (of which the letter of Pliny<sup>11</sup> is no unimportant proof,) their unresisting obedience to the civil governors, who so often ill-treated them, and their charity towards each other, prove both the sincerity of their faith, and the truth of the religion which they had embraced.

The astonishing revolution in the human mind and manners, which the new religion thus produced—a change from the darkness, and corruption, and abominations of Gentile idolatries, and Jewish traditions, to the pure and benevolent graces of Christianity—a change in itself most difficult, and effected in the face of all the additional obstacles already noticed—forms an invincible argument for the truth of the Revelation. The conversion was, even by the admission of heathens themselves, from bad to good, from vice and dissoluteness of morals, to purity and love. The history of the world affords no parallel to this illustrious fact.

Nor should it be forgotten, that amongst the numerous converts to the Christian faith, were persons of all ranks, as we have more than once had occasion to remark, and of all stations—men of cautious inquiry, of singular acuteness of mind, and of sound and capacious judgment—men as capable of examining a question, and as fearful of being deceived, as any in the world now are. And yet these persons embraced a persecuted religion, renounced all their oldest opinions and habits, avowed their belief in the crucified Nazarene, lived pure and spiritual lives, and died with

<sup>11</sup> See page 262.



peace and composure in his cause. Two of the very first converts to this religion, were persons the best adapted of all others to detect an imposition—Saul, the Jewish zealot, and Sergius Paulus, the Roman proconsul. The first, both by education and habit attached to the institutions of Judaism; the second, “a prudent man;” a person of rank and authority, and attended by a Jew, desirous to turn him from the faith. Both were men of education, inquiry, and talent. The submission of such men to the gospel, more especially of St. Paul, whose labours and sufferings afterwards, in the cause of Christianity, have never been paralleled, and who crowned those labours by his martyrdom, can only be accounted for by the divine power which attended the religion of Christ.<sup>12</sup>

To judge more easily of the amazing force of this argument, let us compare the first success of the gospel, with such other cases as come under our own observation. The progress of Mahometanism is in full contrast, in all its causes and characteristics, with that of the Christian faith. It arose in the seventh century amongst a warlike people, in an age of gross darkness; was founded by a person of one of the best families of his country; it was composed of Jewish legends, and

<sup>12</sup> It is no small confirmation of the argument from the first propagation of the gospel, that the unbeliever is obliged to have recourse to the very effects produced by the Christian doctrines, for reasons to disparage the divine interference to which we so justly ascribe it. What are Gibbon's five natural causes, as he terms them—the zeal of the first Christians, their doctrine of a future life, the miraculous powers ascribed to them, their pure morals, and their union—but so many EFFECTS of Christianity on the hearts and lives of the converts? And what does he gain by calling their zeal intolerant, and their morals austere; and by insinuating that the doctrine of a future life, and the miraculous powers, were suppositions? Does he not betray the weakness of an argument, which assumes premises against the uniform evidence of all history?

the popular superstitions of Arabia, mingled with sentiments and doctrines gathered from the Christian scriptures; and proposing a code of morals comparatively lax; together with sensual and voluptuous recompences—in other words, it was a religion adapted to the corrupt taste, indulgent to the passions, and modelled to the ignorance of the times. In all these respects, it illustrates, by the contrast, the purity, and beneficence, and sublimity of the Christian doctrine. Mahomet, further, was entirely destitute of credentials—no miracles were even alleged—he pretended to no prophecies—no seal therefore of divine authority was appended to his claims. Whatever success, then, may have attended a debased and vicious religion, resting on no one attestation of a celestial original, but simply courting the passions of an age of ignorance and depravity, can never be placed in competition with the doctrine of Christianity. But Mahometanism, be it noted, had, after all, no success, so long as the peaceful means of persuasion and argument were alone employed; whereas Christianity converted the whole world by meek instruction and patient suffering. Mahometanism failed of making any progress, till it renounced the arts of peace, and unsheathed the sword. The design of the Koran was, as we have observed, not to propagate a religion, but to form soldiers, and inspire martial courage; and it was in this way that it obtained prevalence and prosperity. It followed in the train of armies, and was propagated at the edge of the scymitar. Such a contrast displays in yet brighter lustre the mild glory of that doctrine which, unaided by human power, and in the midst of sufferings and contempt, surpassed, in the extent and splendour of its conquests, all the sanguinary conversions of the false prophet.

But, let us turn next to our Christian missions amongst the Jews and Heathen. We have just spoken of a false religion, let us now see what light

our observation upon the progress of the true, under ordinary circumstances, can cast upon the argument in hand. We have Jews and Heathens now. Efforts have been used for the conversion of both in every age of the Christian church; but more especially during the last thirty or forty years. What, however, has been the effect? A greater number of Jews certainly were converted under the first discourse of St. Peter, at the day of Pentecost, than have been gained during the eighteen hundred years which have elapsed since. And as to the Heathen, probably one year of the apostolic labours amongst the Gentiles, equalled in point of success, not merely the thirty or forty years of the united exertions of the Christian church, with all its external advantages of superior civilization, influence, authority, and learning, in our own day, but the thousand years which preceded them. If the comparison be objected to on the ground that the apostles were furnished with miraculous powers, and the extraordinary measures of the grace and influence of the Holy Ghost, I grant the fact, and employ it in the confirmation of my argument. The apostolic inspiration is the point to be proved; and the admission that the immense difference between the first success of the gospel, and its present progress, is to be attributed to that inspiration, is precisely the conclusion at which we are to arrive. On the supposition that Christianity was propagated by merely human means, there is no reason why we should not succeed in our missions to the same extent as the apostles. In all other respects, except in that of the power of the Holy Spirit in his miraculous gifts and his larger measure of grace, we have much the advantage of the first propagators of the gospel. Our missionaries in India and Africa are invested with more circumstances of respect and authority. They have the advantages of civilization, and derive aid from improvements in the arts, especially printing. The

doctrine is the same ; the heart of man the same ; the effect to be produced the same. The vast difference in the result, marks, what we are now contending for, the correspondent difference in the endowments of the teachers. The apostolic doctrine, resting on miraculous operations, and sustained by the extraordinary grace of God, is the only rational account to be given of the phenomena of the case.

But, I come yet closer to ourselves, and ask any one competent to judge of the progress of religious reforms, and practical revivals of piety in our several countries and neighbourhoods, whether the propagation of truth is so rapid amongst us, as to make it probable that the first apostles were unaided by an immediate power from above ? You know the difficulty of diffusing and maintaining the real spirit of Christianity even amongst professed Christians ; you know the reluctance of the human mind to the true obedience of faith ; you know how soon negligence, vice, ignorance, obduracy, creep in ; and with what difficulty they are expelled from the mass of any population. You know that it is only by a simple recurrence to the doctrine of the New Testament, with fervent prayer for the sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit, that any success attends our labours. You are prepared, therefore, to judge how far the feeble and unsupported apostles were likely to have subdued the idolatrous and corrupt gentile world to the doctrine of the cross, without that extraordinary succour which it is the object of this lecture to maintain.

Cast your eyes, moreover, on the page of ecclesiastical history, and tell me how have reforms in Christianity, when it has been decayed, succeeded—how did the labours of Augustine, and Claudius of Turin, and Peter Waldo, and Luther and his noble associates, prosper ? Was it by unaided power, was it by human wisdom, was it by mere reasoning and moral

persuasion? Was it not by a distinct recurrence to the power of the Spirit of God—not indeed in his miraculous operations, but in those sacred offices of making the revealed truth of the gospel effectual to the heart, which had been forgotten during the ages of Papal superstition? And, after all, how limited has been the success of any or all these reforms, compared with the rapid triumphs of the first preachers of the Christian truth, amidst difficulties infinitely more complicated! Every case we can contemplate, in short, illustrates that glorious and immediate interference of the God of truth and mercy, to which the gospel owed its first establishment and success.

But we must pass on.

So much time, however, has been occupied, that we can only offer a few remarks on the proximate topic, the **PRESERVATION AND CONTINUANCE OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE WORLD.** For so holy a doctrine could never have maintained its ground, as it has done, for eighteen centuries, if it had not been from God. It is not the mere circumstance of duration on which I here insist; but the duration of such a religion, so holy in its texture, so high in its claims, so strict in its laws, so unworldly in its spirit, so opposed to all the vices and passions of mankind in all its precepts,—such a religion assuming to be of God, and resting its pretensions on the broad and palpable miraculous actions of its founders and first teachers, must, if it had been a delusion, and unattended with a divine interference, have failed, and have long since been left to the derision of the world. Had Christianity been of man, its folly would have been detected, and the enthusiasm or the craft of its abettors exposed, sometime or other after its promulgation. Some inherent defect, or some outward opposition, would have unmasked the deceit. For eighteen hundred years it has been in a state of continual probation; it has

passed through every variety of obstacle; its enemies have had every opportunity of exhibiting its weaker parts, if it has any; or inventing some system which may supersede it, if such can be found. And yet this religion, which began by encountering all the prejudices and passions of mankind, remains to the present hour unsullied in its purity, untouched in its evidences, undiminished in its virtue and effects. If any historical facts of unquestionable authority had been found in any part of the world, to refute its records, it would have sunk before the discovery; but so far is this from being the case, that the researches of historians and the skill of philosophers, as we have observed in previous lectures, have only confirmed the scripture narratives. The wide circle of the whole globe has supplied no one undoubted testimony against our religion, though not half of it had been traversed when the scriptures were written. The Christian Church has seen every shade of human opinion, has witnessed every variety of persecution, has been placed under all possible circumstances of civilization, knowledge, and form of government, and the result of these united experiments has been a continually increased attestation to her immutable truth and purity. She has, moreover, been called to encounter the secret sap of divisions and corruptions in her own body; she has been dragged into unnatural alliances with all the crookedness and ambition of human policy; she has been stripped at one time of her proper attributes, and been loaded at another with corruptions and superstitions—but from all these transformations she has emerged without injury. The standard of her sacred books has remained the same, the blessing of the Holy Spirit in his sanctifying influence has continued, and a reviving piety in various ages, has recalled her wandering family to her pure and divine doctrines and temper.

Open attacks have been, also, made upon the Chris-

tian faith by infidels and sceptics. In the last century but one, we experienced in England the assaults of a profligate but insidious band of literary unbelievers. In our own day we have witnessed the conspiracy of the French philosophical school to obliterate the remembrance of Christianity from the earth—and we have witnessed also the dignity with which she has risen from the combat, and reared again her standard in the very country which attempted her overthrow.

Never was Revelation more honoured in the eyes of Christendom, than by the efforts which have been made of late years in the work of Christian Missions in various parts of the Heathen world. And, perhaps, the single institution of the British and Foreign Bible Society, simple as is its structure, and warmly as it has been opposed, has done more to mark the importance of the scriptures, and to recall men to this one fountain of truth, than all the other expedients which have been devised.

In short, no other instance can be produced in the history of the world, of a system of doctrines or opinions which has withstood for so many centuries a succession of attacks, varying through all the stages between merciless persecution and malicious sophistry, but the instance of Christianity. Paganism fell the instant the secular arm was removed, and she was left to her own resources. Mahometanism was planted by the sword, and is sinking in proportion as the warlike spirit has declined in her votaries. Christianity blooms in perpetual vigour, and retains, after every trial, the genuine features of truth, sanctity, and authority.

Let every candid hearer review these points, and say whether the propagation and perpetuity of our holy religion be not a proof of its divine authority. Let *him* remember the singularity of the attempt, the

rapidity and extent of the success, the nature of the doctrine, the peculiar obstacles it had to surmount, and the immense change produced in all the habits of the converts; and let him contrast all this with what his observation suggests in the history of the church and of the world, and close the whole by contemplating the calm and dignified position of Christianity at the present hour. When he has considered these points, let him unite the argument derived from them, with the proofs previously produced from miracles and prophecies, and I think he will confess that the facts of the propagation of the Gospel are in themselves an irresistible argument of its divine original.

But this is not all. A great additional force is added to this conclusion, by remembering that all these FACTS OF THE PROPAGATION OF CHRISTIANITY, incontrovertible as they are in themselves, were further in DIRECT FULFILMENT of the predictions of the Old Testament prophets and of our Lord, repeatedly and most expressly declared. The general argument from prophecy we stated in our last lectures. Now the one great end of all the scheme which we then developed, was this very establishment of Christianity, this very throwing open the privileges of the church to all nations, this very triumph of the gospel over idolatry and vice. The wonderful success of Christianity was in pursuance of a declared purpose, announced in the earliest ages of mankind, and renewed from time to time in a still more explicit manner. In the case of the propagation of the gospel we see a divine pledge, given centuries before in the word of prophecy, redeemed and fulfilled.

A new confirmation of the two arguments results from this union.

Four thousand years before the times of the gospel, the promised seed was predicted. By the mouth of Jacob, the gathering of the nations to the future



Messiah was foretold. Moses and David and Isaiah, and all the prophets, predicted the calling of the Gentiles, their incorporation into the Christian church, the conversion of the world. We noticed this in our view of the prophecies of the Messiah.

The event, therefore, of the propagation of the gospel, when it took place, had not only all the weight belonging to its separate and independent importance, and all the authority derived from the previous evidences from miracles and prophecies, but moreover all the superadded proof of an issue appointed and foretold by Almighty God, all the additional impress of design and prescience and arrangement and sovereignty, in the fact itself. This very propagation was the blessing foretold by "all the holy prophets since the world began."

The case is stronger than this. After a series of predictions for four thousand years, our Lord appeared upon earth. The Jewish people had forgotten their spiritual privileges and blessings, had misunderstood their prophecies, had loaded their religion with traditions and the commandments of men, had cherished vain hopes of a temporal Messiah, a political deliverance, an earthly rule over the nations. Faith and charity and spirituality had fled. They reject, therefore, the Son of God. They blind their eyes against his miracles, and harden their hearts against his doctrine. They crucify him at last as a blasphemer; but not before he had predicted his own resurrection, predicted the descent of the Holy Ghost, predicted the promulgation of the gospel among the nations, predicted the dissolution of the Jewish economy, and the very apostles who should lay the foundations of a spiritual kingdom; predicted the persecutions of his followers; and the rapid extension, and the "silent and moral manner"<sup>13</sup> of the propagation of his religion in the world.

<sup>13</sup> Benson.

With these predictions he sunk into the grave. On the truth of them he ventured his religion. If he had not been the Son of God, if he had not risen, if his religion had not been diffused by the power of the Holy Ghost, Christianity would have expired in its birth. But, lo, he rises triumphant from the grave ; lo, he appears during forty days to his disciples ; lo, he expounds to them the mysteries of his sufferings, and affirms that he will return to his Father and pour out the gifts of the Holy Spirit. With these prophetic declarations, he ascends in the sight of the apostles, having first given them a solemn commission for the conversion of the nations, and an assurance that he would "be with them always even unto the end."

The descent of the Holy Spirit, and the propagation of the gospel, therefore, were in express fulfilment of these predictions of the Saviour, and in concurrence with all the ancient prophecies from the first dawn of revelation.

I confess to you, my mind sinks under the accumulated conviction of this combined evidence. I confess to you, that the propagation of the gospel assumes, in my view, a character of moral demonstration which no one but the Almighty God could have given it. I see the wisdom and foreknowledge of God in the predictions of it : and his power and truth and mercy in its accomplishment. I can conceive of no higher evidence being proposed to a reasonable creature like man. The divine operations in every part of the Christian revelation demonstrate the immediate hand of God ; and, wherever we look, the proofs of this supernatural original break in upon the humble and sincere heart. The proof of Christianity is an universal proof, springing from all its parts, and attending it in every step of its progress. If one topic fail to produce conviction, let the inquirer act as he does in the case of the divine Providence in the works of nature.

Let him have recourse to the universality of the evidence, the different classes of proof, the concurring and unexpected marks of divine agency and interference.

I. But in order to the full effect of these demonstrations, A RIGHT STATE OF MIND is indispensable. Nothing can satisfy the proud, the obdurate, the captious.—But why do I thus speak?—I see the doubting mind impressed. I behold the mighty force of truth. I hear the confession of the fickle and conceited youth now awakened to consideration. The new and combined demonstration of the divine origin of the Christian religion, from the rapidity and extent of its propagation, fills him with astonishment. He falls down and worships the God of salvation. He acknowledges his former ignorance and folly. He takes up the New Testament with other feelings than he ever did before. He falls prostrate in penitence at the foot of that Saviour whom he had neglected or despised. He breaks off those sins and habits which made unbelief or hesitation unavoidable; and he admits the purifying doctrine of the Son of God.


Go on, then, young inquirer, in the course of sincere penitence and humiliation on which you have begun. Listen not again to the objections and sophistry of the wicked. Open your heart to the full dominion of Christianity. “Bring into captivity every thought unto the obedience of Christ.” Be honest to your convictions. Act upon what you know. Implore the grace of that Holy Spirit in his ordinary operations, whose extraordinary power accompanied the first apostles. The conversion of nations is only the multiplication of the conversion of individuals. You cannot indeed witness the miracles of the gospel, but you receive them by authentic testimony; and you behold before your eyes the accomplishment of the prophecies in their effects. The heart of man is the same, the de-

mands of Christianity are the same. The foundations of penitence the same. The method of pardon and reconciliation, in the meritorious cross of the Son of God, the same. The renovation of the human heart the same. The resistance of our natural passions the same. The obstacles from the world around you of the same kind. The operations of grace vary not essentially from what they were in the apostolic age.

You may attain a similar conviction of the truth of Christianity now, with the first converts. The evidence may somewhat differ in its form and vividness and immediate impression ; but it is the same in authority, truth, and obligation.

II. And the more you thus enter practically into the great question of this lecture, the more will your **CONVICTION BE STRENGTHENED**. If the torrent which rolls by you, once relieves your own thirst, you will understand better its virtue and excellency, and the living source from which it springs. We cannot put men into the possession of the full evidence of any branch of our subject, except as they practically obey the gospel. We state indeed the argument, and if there be any candour of mind, any feeling of morals and religion, any knowledge of human character, any fairness in weighing evidence, we carry conviction into their inmost soul. However slight their acquaintance with the nature of real Christianity, we have proof enough to show that such a religion could never have been propagated by such instruments, in the face of idolatry, vice, sensuality, authority, habit, persecution ; and have subdued the world, without a divine hand.

But how much more forcible and satisfactory is the proof to that man who has understood all the awful doctrines, and experienced and known all the transforming influence of Christianity ? He has then in his own case a demonstration of the power from which



the establishment of Christianity sprung. He perfectly well knows that to effect the conversion of one individual from carelessness, ignorance, prejudice, and vice, to the love and obedience of the gospel, is a work beyond the power of man—a work which in his own case has been difficult, slow, surrounded with obstacles; and which requires, not only for its commencement, but its progress, the continual aids of the Holy Spirit. The conversion, then, of the world from Heathen idolatry and licentiousness, or Jewish formality and pride, to the religion of Christ, could have proceeded from no other hand but that of God. As well might feeble man have attempted to dry up the ocean with his word, as the apostles to stop, by human wisdom, the inundation and torrent and ocean of vice and misery. The same power which created the world, could alone reform it. The same voice which said “to the deep, Be dry, and I will dry up thy rivers;” alone could say to “the wilderness and the solitary place, Be glad for them, and to the desert, Rejoice and blossom as the rose.”

## LECTURE XI.

## BENEFICIAL EFFECTS OF CHRISTIANITY.

## 1 TIMOTHY IV. 8.

*Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.*

WE have reviewed the arguments for the truth of Christianity which are derived from the miracles performed, the prophecies accomplished and now accomplishing in the world, and from its rapid and extensive propagation.

These establish beyond all reasonable question the divine authority of our religion: and we might now pass on to the subject of the inspiration of the scriptures.

But there is another external argument of great moment which I am desirous first to notice, that derived from THE MORE OBVIOUS EFFECTS WHICH CHRISTIANITY HAS PRODUCED AND IS PRODUCING UPON THE WELFARE OF MANKIND.

This is generally classed with the Internal Evidences. And undoubtedly most of the causes from whence it springs, and many of its details, are best reserved for that part of our course. Still I cannot but think that

the beneficial effects of Christianity are so obvious to every candid observer, that we may properly arrange them with the external proofs. It is surely a powerful argument in favour of revelation, that it advances the solid happiness of man, that it has the "promise of the life that now is;" that, whilst its great object is to remedy the fallen state of our nature by the spiritual blessings of redemption, it uniformly dispenses also temporal benefits, and raises the condition, and promotes the present well-being of the human race. Christianity doth this in various ways—it implants those PRINCIPLES on which the welfare of individuals and states depends—it has BANISHED an immense mass of frightful evils from Christian countries—it has MITIGATED many other evils which are not entirely removed—and it has CONFERRED and is conferring the most numerous and substantial positive benefits on mankind.

I. Christianity IMPLANTS THOSE PRINCIPLES upon which the welfare of individuals and states depends.

1. It begins in the proper province of religion, the silent course of private and domestic life. It makes good fathers and mothers of families, good children, honest men-servants and maid-servants, faithful tradesmen, quiet villagers, peaceful manufacturers and husbandmen. These are the materials of public prosperity. The welfare of states is only the consequence of individual happiness.

2. In the next place, Christianity arouses the powers of conscience and directs aright its determinations. It gives solemnity and sanctity to oaths—on which the security of persons and property, and, indeed, of society in all its relations, so much depends. Thus it lays the foundations and forms the sanction of human laws. Wherever it spreads, it sets up a judge and avenger within the breast, and governs man by the fear of an invisible tribunal.

3. Then it discourages and tends to eradicate the vices which most directly infest society—rapacity, violence, malice, revenge, profligacy, treachery; and establishes the contrary virtues of honesty, meekness, forgiveness of injuries, purity, fidelity and truth: and thus restores peace and harmony amongst men.

4. Further, it mitigates that insatiable ardour after worldly possessions and enjoyments, which is the spring of so many acts of injustice and oppression; by elevating man to a consideration of spiritual, intellectual, solid, pure, eternal blessings.

5. It implants especially the principle of enlarged, active, effectual benevolence, in opposition to that inordinate self-love which is the bane of every virtue, the enemy of all public spirit and love of country, and the gangrene of states. “On earth peace, good-will towards men,” is inscribed on the banners of the Christian faith.

6. It is, again, the spring of personal exertion and beneficial industry—it expels indolence and self-indulgence, and inspires an active and useful diligence, the employment of life to the most valuable purposes, and the occupying with our time and various talents as accountable stewards of the Great Householder.

7. Lastly: it elevates the whole character, enlarges and improves the mind, raises man in the scale of being, brings him back to himself; to his fellow-men, to his country, to all the ends for which he was created, to his God. It first teaches him to “love the Lord with all his heart, and soul, and mind, and strength;” and then “to love his neighbour as himself.”

II. By the operation of these principles the Christian doctrine has BANISHED AN IMMENSE MASS OF FRIGHTFUL EVILS from Christian states.

1. Idolatry with all its atrocious impurities and



cruelties was gradually expelled from the kingdoms of Europe, Asia, and Africa, as our holy faith was propagated. Human sacrifices prevailed in the heathen world. Men "offered their sons and their daughters unto devils." The polished Greeks and Romans were infected with this horrid practice, as well as the ruder Scythians and Thracians. It reached from one end of the globe to the other. Our own ancestors offered their Druidical victims; and on the discovery of South America, it was found that Montezuma immolated a prodigious number of human beings annually to the sun.<sup>1</sup> The light of truth scared away the monster from the Christian folds.

2. Again, the heathen were "full of murder," as the Apostle to the Romans strongly expresses it. Scenes of blood made a part of the public diversions of the people. Miserable slaves were exposed to the fury of wild beasts for an amusement and recreation to the populace, and were engaged in mortal combat with each other upon a public stage. Such bloody sports are no more.

Women of condition would have no relish, as of old, for the sight. They would not be able to behold it with so much composure as to observe and admire the skill and agility of the champions, and interest themselves in the issue of the combat. The tender virgin would not rise from her seat in ecstasy as the victor put his dagger to the throat of the vanquished; and exclaim, "He is my delight;" and give him a sign with her thumb to lay open the breast of the prostrate wretch. Nor would the audience applaud

<sup>1</sup> See Bishop Porteus's *Beneficial Effects of Christianity*; to which excellent summary of Ryan's larger work I am much indebted. Bishop Horslev's *Sermon before the Philanthropic Society*; Paley; Wilberforce's *Practical View*; Fuller's *Gospel its own Witness*; Harness' *Happiness of Men*; Sumner's *Reception*; the *Monthly Lectures*, 1827; and Dewar's *Designs of Christianity*, have also aided me.

and shout when the blood of the dying man, gushing from the ghastly wound, flowed upon the stage.<sup>2</sup>

3. Further, Christian nations are not destitute, as the Heathen, of "natural affection." "No man in a Christian country, would avoid the burden of a family by the exposure of his infant children; no man would think of settling the point with his intended wife before marriage, that the females that she might bear, should be all exposed, and the boys only reared."<sup>3</sup>

4. Once more; Christianity has cleared away the immense mass of misery and vice, arising from the heathen customs of divorce and polygamy. The most profligate of women now would not, as some of Rome did, count the years by the number of her husbands. The statutes of all Christian countries are framed in conformity with the rules of the gospel, and no cause of divorce is allowed but that which violates the fundamental law of the union.

By this one act, Christianity has more benefited mankind, than can be adequately conceived. All the social affections, all the purity and comfort of domestic life, all the duties of family morals and religion, all the right education of children, spring from the inviolability of the nuptial contract. Perhaps the superiority of Europe over Asia, more depends on the abrogation of the practice of polygamy, and the recur-

\* Bishop Horsley, vol. 3. Sermon xl. before Phil. Soc.

<sup>2</sup> Bishop Horsley at *supra*. The general neglect of human life is a striking characteristic of Paganism. The value of human existence and happiness was reserved to be proved by that religion which teaches the immortality of the soul and the redemption of it by Christ. "The truth is, so very little value do these people (the Hindoos) set on their own lives, that we cannot wonder at their caring little for the life of another. The cases of suicide are double those of suttees; men, and still more women, throw themselves down wells or drink poison, for apparently the slightest reasons, generally out of some quarrel, and in order that their blood may lie at their enemy's door."—*Bishop Heber's Journal*, vol. i. p. 269.

rence to the original institution of marriage, than on any other cause.

5. In fact, the Christian faith has put an end to the degradation and dishonour to which the whole female sex had been doomed by Pagan nations. Woman is no longer accounted as a slave and beast of burden. The drudgery of the meanest and most servile occupations, is no longer imposed on her feeble shoulders. The injustice, the cruelty, the ungenerous and harsh contempt of her by the other sex, is no more. Among Christian nations she is no longer, like the wretched inmate of the seraglio, doomed to subserve the base passions of a pampered master. Christianity seems to say to the sex generally, what our Lord did to one afflicted with bodily distemper, "Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity."

6. Again, the cruelties of domestic slavery no longer pursue with their curse the great bulk of mankind. It cannot now be said of any Christian state, as it was of Attica, that out of 450,000 inhabitants, only 40,000 are free. Our citizens no longer possess ten or twenty thousand slaves, tilling their grounds in chains. The master of a family no longer buys and sells his servants like cattle, nor punishes and tortures them as he pleases, nor puts them to death with or without reason. Youths of condition no longer venture forth to murder their unhappy fellow-creatures for amusement, by thousands at a time. A Claudius no longer gluts his lakes with dying gladiators, nor does a Tacitus record the deed with admiration. A Veditius Pollio no longer throws his servants, on the most trifling fault, into his fish-ponds, to feed his lampreys; nor, upon a master of a household being found dead, are all his servants, as formerly, amounting sometimes to thousands, put to death.

One foul blot, indeed, upon the Christian nations remains, the cruel traffic in African slaves—a blot

which this country, thank God, has wiped off; and which most of the other countries of Europe have professedly abandoned—and which they will effectually and totally renounce, in proportion as Christian principles prevail. We have still, as Englishmen, to follow up the act of national righteousness which we performed in abolishing the trade, by immediate and vigorous measures for ameliorating the condition, and providing for the earliest possible emancipation, of the descendants of the injured Africans, in order to vindicate in this respect our holy faith.<sup>4</sup>

7. Private assassination is another of the monstrous fiends which the true religion has put to flight. The guardian mixes not now the deadly cup for the unhappy orphan, whose large property has been entrusted to his management. The husband no longer poisons the wife for her dowry, nor the wife her husband, that she may marry the adulterer. A Christian magistrate has no longer to punish capitally for this one crime, three thousand persons during part of a season, as was the case with a Roman prætor in Italy.

But, I cannot dwell on all the evils banished by the doctrine of Christ.—The unlimited power of parents, extending to the liberty, and even life of their children—the vindication and defence of suicide—piracy—public indecencies between the sexes—the incests, and unnatural crimes, which polluted the philosopher and statesman of old, and which the poet did not fear to descant upon with the utmost indifference, and connect, forsooth, with moral reflections upon the brevity of life—are all gone.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> It is impossible not to lament at the practice prevailing in some of the United States of America, of trading in slaves, in the very teeth of their own free institutions, and their jealous attachment to political liberty.

<sup>5</sup> Pallida mors æquo pulsat pede pauperum tabernas

Regumque turres ———

Nec tenerum Lycidam mirabere, quo calet juvenus,  
Nunc omnis, et mox virgines tepebunt.—*Hor. Car. i. 4.*

These, and a thousand similar evils, have been banished from Christian states, and banished by the Christian doctrine. For that we owe their expulsion to this cause is manifest, because it was Christianity that first raised her voice against them; it was she that first prohibited them to her disciples; whilst all the wisest men of the heathen world, at the period of greatest refinement and highest intellectual cultivation, justified, connived at, and practised them.<sup>6</sup> It was moreover, by Christian emperors that the first public enactments against them were framed. Constantine, upon his conversion to the Christian faith, to stop the crime of infanticide, ordained that the public should maintain the children of those parents who were unable to provide for them. In A. D. 319, he made it a capital offence to expose infants. He promulgated also the first edict against gladiatorial shows; and discouraged perpetual servitude, which was gradually lessened, till at length it was entirely banished from Christian states. The Christian religion, indeed, preserved the Roman empire from that sudden destruction which her vices threatened; it infused into her government and people, a new virtue and life; and though the whole mass of the state was too far corrupted to be recovered, it broke the rapidity and violence of its fall.

But this leads us to notice,

III. That Christianity has promoted the welfare of states, by MITIGATING MANY EVILS which she has not yet entirely removed;—she protests against them,

<sup>6</sup> The favourite notion of infidelity, that improvements in morals and virtue are chiefly owing to the progress of civilization, is contrary to the experience of all ages of the world—Egypt, Babylon, Greece, Rome, India, testify against such an assumption. Civilization, except as accompanied, and animated, and directed by Christianity, has uniformly corrupted and deteriorated public morals.

and raises up the barrier of public opinion against their progress.

The Christian revelation is a religion, not a mere code of laws. It can therefore only reach public institutions and usages through private character. To get rid of these usages, the reigning part of the community must act, and act in concert. Where, however, Christianity is not sufficiently obeyed to eradicate national evils altogether and at once, it begins by mitigating and abating them.

1. The horrors of war, before the coming of Christ, were inconceivable. Ambition, the love of conquest, revenge, were openly professed as its object. "To glut our souls with the cruellest vengeance upon our enemies, is perfectly lawful, is an appetite implanted in us by nature, and is the most exquisite pleasure that the human mind can taste," is the language of Gylippus, speaking of an invading army, as recorded by the great historian Thucydides.<sup>7</sup> "Avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath," is the command of our divine Master—and which would have long since extinguished war, and established universal peace and tranquillity, had it been duly obeyed. It has, however, actually been softening the cruelties of national conflicts for eighteen hundred years. We do not now begin our wars openly for interest, aggression, the acquisition of territory. We do not murder every human creature in a besieged place, as of old. The loss of thousands in the field, is not the prelude to the desolation of a whole country, to indiscriminate massacre, and utter extermination.

The first symptoms of the mitigation of the horrors of war appeared in the fifth century, when Rome was stormed and plundered by the Goths under Alaric. Those rude soldiers were Christians, and their conduct, in the hour of conquest, exhibited a new and

<sup>7</sup> Thucyd. l. vii. 540. ed. Frank.

wonderful example of the power of Christianity over the fierce passions of man. Alaric no sooner found himself master of the city, than he gave orders that all the unarmed inhabitants who had fled to the churches, or to the sepulchres of the martyrs, should be spared. This, you will observe, was an instance of mercy and moderation in a whole army, in common soldiers, flushed with victory, and smarting under the wounds they had received in obtaining it. Even Gibbon acknowledges that "the pure and genuine influence of Christianity may be traced in its beneficial, though imperfect effects, on the barbarian proselytes of the north. On the fall of the Roman empire, it evidently mollified the ferocious temper of the conquerors." May we not add, that in a much later period, when the fierceness of a successful, but most unprincipled usurper, had brought back as much of the ancient atrocities of war, as the spirit of the times would allow, the moderation of the allied army, on the taking of Paris, was a somewhat similar illustration of the influence of Christianity. Indeed, from the days of Alaric to the present, the cruelty of war has declined; till now, not only are captives among Christians treated with humanity, and conquered provinces governed with equity, but in the actual prosecution of a war, it is become a maxim to abstain from all unnecessary violence. Wanton depredations are rarely committed upon private property, and the individual is screened as much as possible from the evil of the public quarrel. To spare the effusion of blood, has come to be accounted the highest exercise of military skill. The greatest captains of our age are as much famed for humanity to the vanquished, and compassion to their wounded men, as for conduct and valour in the field.\*

\* The treatment of persons imprisoned for civil offences is also so softened, as to be a totally different thing from what it was in heathen governments. The philanthropy of such in-

2. Again, the spirit of faction and of party animosities in states, is far less bitter and permanent, and breaks out into much less violent excesses, than in the times of the Greeks and Romans. It is now mollified by the intercourse of private society, and overborne by a regard to the interests of the nation; and does not lead to outrage, treachery, assassination, and private war.

3. All the vices which most fatally sap the foundations of public tranquillity are mitigated. Venality and corruption in ministers of state, and judges, and high political functionaries, are almost unknown throughout Christendom. Acts of oppression against the voice of law are now generally reprobated. Gross breaches of public trust are infrequent. Vice has less of a malignant and destructive character than it had before the mild doctrine of Christianity appeared.

4. Again, as to offences against temperance and chastity, Christianity has brought us to a far purer state than the heathen world. The worst excesses of modern voluptuaries would seem sanctity and continence compared with those unnatural debaucheries of the Pagans, which were so habitual in their manners, that they stained the lives of their gravest philosophers, and made a part even of the religious rites of the politest nations.<sup>9</sup>

5. In short, Christianity raises the standard of pub-

dividuals as Howard and Fry—the latter a female of the most retired of the Christian sects—casts a strong light on the character of the beneficent religion by which they have been and are actuated.

<sup>9</sup> “All that is bad about the Hindoos, appears to arise either from the defective motives which their religion supplies, or the wicked actions which it records of their gods, or encourages in their own practice. Yet it is strange to see, though this is pretty generally allowed, how slow men are to admit the advantage or necessity of propagating Christianity among them. **CRIMES UNCONNECTED WITH RELIGION ARE NOT COMMON in Ghazeepoor.**”—*Bishop Heber*, i. 270.



lie opinion as to morals and religion, protests boldly against every vice, and erects certain common barriers, as it were, of order and decency, over which few dare to press. The grosser vices are shamed and covered with confusion; as rape, adultery, incest, offences against nature; and, in a degree, drunkenness, theft, fraud, and profane swearing. No man can be in reputation who commits these crimes. The highest stations in the community cannot shield men from the infamy of them. Public confidence can be fully acquired only by private virtue.

Thus Christianity benefits mankind, not only by banishing an immense mass of evil altogether, but by restraining, curbing, mitigating what it has not yet cured. It makes men better in spite of themselves, it works upon them by a regard to reputation and the fear of shame, where it has no footing in their hearts to gain a direct influence. What, we may ask, would individuals and nations be without the Christian religion, inadequately as too many of them are influenced by the true spirit of her laws? Thousands are kept in order by Christianity, who are not Christians. They are insensibly guided by the rectitude which the New Testament communicates to public opinion.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Bolingbroke acknowledges the advantages of Christianity to the first Christian state. He says, "that Constantine acted the part of a sound politician in protecting Christianity, as it tended to give firmness and solidity to his empire, softened the ferocity of the army, and reformed the licentiousness of the provinces; and, by infusing a spirit of moderation and submission to government, tended to extinguish those principles of avarice and ambition, injustice and violence, by which so many factions were formed." He confesses also, that "no religion ever appeared in the world whose natural tendency was so much directed to promote the peace and happiness of mankind."

And yet Bolingbroke and Gibbon, with unaccountable inconsistency, lived and died infidels. Pride and vice are the keys to such a mystery.

The whole Christian argument might be maintained on the

But this is not all.

**IV. Christianity has ACTUALLY CONFERRED, AND IS CONFERRING, NUMEROUS, MOST SUBSTANTIAL, AND POSITIVE BENEFITS ON INDIVIDUALS AND NATIONS.**

1. It has elevated and blessed the female sex in the most striking manner. It has not only raised women from the degradation into which they were sunk in the heathen times, as we have just mentioned, but has restored them to all their just rights, has clothed them with all those tender attributes for which the goodness of God designed them; has made woman the companion, the friend, the solace of man; the sharer of his joys and sorrows, the instructress of their mutual offspring; the equal partaker of his social comforts and advantages; with only that gentle subordination which exempts them from the perpetual uneasiness which an absolute equality would generate. Christian piety has repaid them the arrears of ages of cruelty and neglect. We hear more of women in the New Testament, than in all the writings of philosophers. They now, generally speaking, take the precedence in personal piety, of the stronger sex.

2. Christianity, again, has blessed the lower orders of society, and raised them to a degree of comfort, respectability, and information, unknown before the promulgation of the gospel. Christianity has taught us that "all men are brethren," that all were "made of one blood," that all are redeemed by one Saviour, that all are equal as immortal and accountable beings, that all are capable of the same lessons of heavenly wisdom, that all are to read the same scriptures, to worship in the same temple, and approach the same altar. What is it that has opened before all classes

admissions of one or other of the leading infidel writers; and no contest remain, unless, if it could then be called one, with the miserable, ignorant ferocity of Paine and his associates.

of men the field of competition and improvement? What is it that imparts to them a share of general knowledge, the discoveries of science, and the pleasures of intellectual improvement? What is it that breaks down the impassable barriers of caste, and places men on the common ground of their respective merits and exertions? My brethren, it is the religion of Christ that has done all this. This religion proposes its blessings especially to the lowly—raises, improves, illuminates, emancipates, restores the poor and outcast, and opens before them the career of useful diligence and honourable exertion. And yet, whilst it does all this, it teaches them the duties of humility and cheerful subjection to authority. No voice but that of the Christian apostle, ever addressed to the body of mankind such words as these, "Be subject to principalities and powers, obey magistrates, be ready to every good work, speak evil of no man, be no brawlers, but gentle, showing all meekness to all men."

3. And what, again, has instituted all the charitable designs for the relief of human wretchedness, which are multiplied around us, but the merciful religion of Christ? What has founded our hospitals, opened our dispensaries, formed our unnumbered societies for bettering the condition of the poor, and aiding them under the various calamities to which our nature is exposed? What is it that framed the various wise and humane systems which provide for the sick and indigent, but Christianity? What is it that founded so many thousand institutions for the religious education of the poor? What has made the duties of humanity and benevolence the popular and habitual topic of anxiety and effort? What planted in London the THREE OR FOUR HUNDRED charitable institutions which are now, as angels of peace, walking through the haunts of vice and misery, and scattering blessings wherever they go?

4. Again, what has encircled age with reverence in every rank and condition of society? What has inspired for the hoary head and declining years that respect and gratitude, which heathenism knew so little of, as a pervading principle of social life? What has opened in human intercourse those copious sources of tenderness, the love and piety of children to their aged and infirm Christian relatives and parents?

5. Further, what has given to man one day in seven, for repose from toil, for the cultivation of his intellectual and spiritual being, for repairing the decays which his exhausted powers, after six days of labour, require? For connecting man with his God, and preparing him for eternity?

6. Once more, what has infused into Christian legislators and princes, the temper of equity and mercy? Christianity meddles not, indeed, with the particular form of human governments, nor does it interfere with any acknowledged and long-established authority; but it teaches governors of every class the unbending rules of justice and truth. Christian governments are, for the most part, moulded by the principles of our holy religion. A mild, paternal spirit of legislation has taken the place of brute force and capricious violence. Governments are now acting for the good of the governed, and not for the pleasure of a despot. The most arbitrary Christian states are controlled by religion. Under the heathen governments there was neither internal tranquillity nor external peace. They were continually agitated and distracted within by popular commotions and sanguinary convulsions, or exposed without to unnecessary and inexorable wars. And in their declines they were torn to pieces by such dreadful massacres and proscriptions, as cannot be recited without horror. Christianity has made princes the fathers of their people. Even in the dispensation of punishment for crime, the severity of the law has been gradually mitigated. Capital pun-

ishment is not now inflicted, as under the governments, for the slightest offences ; nor inflicted in the most despotic Christian states, upon the bare order of the sovereign, without trial, conviction, sentence, and warrant of execution.

7. Further, the Christian religion has conferred upon her subjects the blessing of equal justice in the administration of courts of law civil and criminal jurisprudence of the state great bulwark of liberty, that most powerful of the rights and immunities, the persons and of the subject—was among the heathen far from that degree of purity which prevails in our lands. In Rome, especially in the later part of the republic, the courts of justice were one scene of the most open and undisguised iniquity, partiality, and corruption ; so that hardly possible for the poor man to obtain redress from the most cruel injuries, or for a rich man to be exempted from punishment for the most atrocious crimes.

But now the spirit of Christianity has been interwoven with the texture of governments, all ranks are placed under the equal protection of laws ; and in our own country, and the other parts of the world where our religion obtains in its greatest purity, an evenhanded distribution of justice, the security of person and property, the enjoyment of a high degree of civil and religious liberty, the freedom from vexatious and unequal imposts, the open career presented to virtue and talent, the repose and tranquillity of domestic life—our towns and castles dismantled, the long ages of internal peace—all proclaim the beneficial effects of the doctrine which has produced them.

8. Even the most distant provinces of the British commonwealths feel the salutary influence of the principles of religious legislation at home. In the time of the Roman sway, the provinces were the spoil of tyrants. Every governor was an oppressor.

scourge. The privileges enjoyed at the seat of the empire, were violated with impunity in its distant regions. Christianity diffuses its benefits. Our provincial governors carry to remote climes the freedom, the justice, the institutions, the tranquillity, the security for persons and property, of the parent state. The Hindoo acknowledges the difference between a Mahometan and Christian conquest. It was the glory of one governor-general of India to abolish infanticide in Bengal; it was the glory of another to plant the seeds of moral and religious culture; it was the glory of a third, to put an end to the immolation of widows.<sup>12</sup> In the mean time, the British authorities, in the various provinces, are pushing our national improvements and advantages wherever they come.<sup>13</sup>

Such is Christianity in her influence on the welfare of mankind. She implants the principles on which the well-being of individuals and states depends. She has banished the most frightful evils, she mitigates and raises a barrier against every other; she dispenses the most palpable and important benefits. Nor has she lost this power by the lapse of ages. See her entering now the heathen lands in our modern missions. See her by the labours of Schwartz and his companions, in Southern India; or by the toil of the Moravian brethren, in Greenland and South Africa; or by the recent exertions of the London missionary institution of our own times, in the Pacific ocean, displaying and repeating, as it were, her mighty works in blessing wretched man.<sup>14</sup> I follow her to the prostrate tribes

<sup>12</sup> The Marquesses Wellesley and Hastings and Lord William Bentinck.

<sup>13</sup> The propagation of the discovery of vaccination has been zealous and extensive, as becomes the Christian philanthropy.

<sup>14</sup> "They are not Christians, but Pagans," says Lactantius, A. D. 306, "who rob by land and commit piracy by sea;

of one region of Paganism, or to the wild and debased natives of another. I see the stupidity and indolence of the first—scarcely removed from the fish on which they lived—quickened, stimulated, elevated. I see the fierce, bloody, revengeful spirit of the others—dancing their infernal war-step with the mind of a fury—reduced to meekness, docility, simplicity. I see them casting their cruel and obscene idols to the moles and to the bats, and acknowledging “the one true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent.” I see the tears of penitence flow down their cheeks. I see their manners humanized and softened, stimulated to habits of solid and persevering and well-directed diligence. Principles of truth and purity and uprightness and benevolence take the place of animal indolence and insatiable selfishness and remorseless revenge. I see the Christian institution of marriage opening the sources of the social affections. The Christian village begins to rise. The huts, and churches, and schools, and bridges, and streets, and gardens smile. Commerce visits the newly civilized people. The sabbath interposes a day for religious instruction. The magistrate assumes his office. The minister of religion is the father and friend of all. Disease and vice and misery begin to be lessened and disappear. Virtue, peace, industry, social order, are the lovely fruits of the Christian faith.

I turn from the delightful scene to others of an opposite class. I behold the states of Europe where Christianity has most deeply declined, or the Asiatic and African nations where it was extinguished by the

who poison their wives for their dowries, or their husbands that they may marry their adulterers; who strangle or expose infants, commit incest and unnatural crimes too odious to relate.”—“Give me a man who is choleric, abusive, headstrong, and unruly; with a very few words—the words of God—I will render him as gentle as a lamb. Give me an unjust man, a foolish man, a vicious man; and, on a sudden, he shall become honest, wise, virtuous.”

**Mahometan Imposture.** The temporal calamities, the civil and social oppression, the decay of moral order and mutual benevolence, the want of public liberty, virtue, confidence and integrity, illustrate by the melancholy contrast, the immense value of pure Christianity to man, even as it respects temporal benefits. But I will not proceed further. No candid inquirer can fail to perceive that the whole of these statements constitute a strong additional argument in favour of the divine authority of a religion which is manifestly productive of such benefits.

Not that I am to be understood as denying for a moment the lamentable defects still existing in the institutions and manners of the purest Christian states. In none are the principles of Christianity carried out to their full extent. In none are the blessings of knowledge, and morals, and liberty, and equal laws, and the benign influence of peace dispersed to the degree they might and should. In none are vices and immoralities and public offences against God sufficiently discouraged.

But the argument rests on the larger measure, the far larger measure of every temporal blessing which has been enjoyed since the introduction of Christianity, than under the Heathen governments. The argument rests on the evils which have been banished or mitigated, and on the contrary benefits which have been conferred. The argument rests, not on the minute and narrow examination of a few detached events or some partial impediments, but on the general aspect and course of affairs during all ages since the coming of our Lord, on the universal testimony of history, and the manifest progress of individual and national happiness. Here every thing proclaims the beneficial influence of Christianity, every thing designates her as the friend of man, of human nature, of the whole race, especially of the vast crowds of its population ; every thing declares that she “ has pro-



mise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come."

Much less am I to be understood as implying, that these details of our national and temporal welfare, as promoted by Christianity, go to lessen the guilt of our individual vices and sins as members of Christian nations. On the contrary, they increase our personal responsibility. The conduct of vicious men is, in its aggregate, the very cause that the effects of Christianity are less striking and complete. That our religion has upon the whole produced such immense good, notwithstanding the coldness of so many in her cause and the insincerity and vices of more, is indeed a glorious proof of her divine original. The improved aspect of things, the mighty principles set at work, the positive changes effected, are indeed palpable marks of a revelation from heaven. But these very things aggravate our particular sins, our individual neglect of Christian duty, our impurities, our violations of the sabbath, our scorn of vital religion, our resistance to all the light and knowledge and sacred influence which is diffused around us. God forbid that we should suppose that our external advantages lessen the individual criminality, which, in truth, they augment. Our sins acquire a deeper guilt from the very means of holiness and salvation which we abuse.

I would, therefore, in drawing to a conclusion,

I. Entreat each one to ask himself, how far these good effects of Christianity have been **THE RESULT OF RELIGIOUS PRINCIPLES IN HIMSELF**. Do you, my dear hearers, exhibit in the purity of your manners, the wholesome fruits of the gospel of Christ? Do you so fill up your station in the community as to prove the excellency of the principles on which you act? Do you maintain that uprightness and downright integrity in your dealings, that kindness and friendliness in your temper, that diligence and punc-

tuality in your engagements, that consistency and propriety in your whole conduct, which may enable others to recognize in you the effects of a divine religion? You may be living in a bright day of Christian truth, and in a manner much superior to the heathens as to your particular course of behaviour; and yet there may be no Christian principles effectively at work in your own hearts. It may be others who are operating upon you, and not you who are labouring with others to exhibit the Christian pattern. You may be passive, not active in the business. Christianity may be producing its good effects notwithstanding your irreligion and negligence; not in consequence of your virtue and piety. You may be guided to what is externally right, by custom, a regard to reputation, interest, the general habits of those about you; and not from principle, not from the love of God, not from a conscience of the divine law.

Let me, then, exhort you,

**II. NOT TO STOP SHORT IN THE TEMPORAL BENEFITS OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.** Christianity dispenses good, indeed, to all within its sphere of influence. Like its divine Author, it blesses "the evil and the good, the just and the unjust." But it saves none but those who imbibe its genuine principles, who are humbled for their sins, who receive the gift of pardon in the one sacrifice of Christ, who are led and governed by the Holy Ghost and live a holy life. It is in this way that it communicates "not only the promise of the life that now is," as my text speaks, "but of that which is to come." For its main blessings are spiritual. Its main design is to redeem men from death. Its chief glory is to "destroy the works of the devil." Temporal benefits are strewed by the way. Temporal blessings are incidental. It is only Eternity that exhausts the designs of Christi-

anity. It is the "life that is to come" for which it provides. To stop short in its general advantages, is to lose its noblest designs, to frustrate its grand purposes, to defeat its immense provision of grace and mercy.

Nor; indeed, can its temporal advantages be fully secured, unless you imbibe the spirit of Christianity from which they flow. He only knows the genuine happiness, and peace, and joy, which the gospel dispenses, who drinks them pure and unmixed from the fountain. The dregs are indeed valuable, but have no life-giving virtue. And yet they are considered as every thing by those who, refusing the living streams themselves, receive these dregs through corrupt channels, into the receptacle of an impure heart. A man cannot be happy as a citizen, if he be not a true Christian. Yield then to the friendly invitation of mercy. You acknowledge Christianity as having "promise of the life that now is," receive it as giving also "that life which is to come." Let the lower displays of the divine bounty, lead you to seek the higher and abiding blessings of salvation. Soon will all the pageant of this world be passed, and "the life that now is," be removed and gone. Nothing then will remain but eternity. The temporal benefits you may have derived from Christianity, if those be all, will then avail you nothing. Secure then the eternal life which is offered you in Jesus Christ. Let "the goodness of God lead you to repentance." Let his daily bounties, his constant blessings to individuals and nations, be so many witnesses to you of his providential guidance, and so many inducements to you to seek his face. It is in this way only, that the abundant effects of Christianity can be preserved in each passing age, and handed down to the next. Personal and individual penitence and faith, are the springs of religious prosperity. As these are multi-

plied, Christianity generally is sustained in its purity, and its attendant blessings of every class are propagated and increased. And here I would notice,

III. That the Christian religion is productive of all the advantages we have been detailing, ONLY IN PROPORTION AS IT IS ALLOWED TO DEVELOPE ALL ITS STRENGTH AND ENERGY. If our religious profession sinks into formality, the good effects of Christianity sink with it. If the heavenly medicine be diluted or mingled with foreign ingredients, its virtue is proportionably diminished. Christianity will not contribute effectually to the temporal good of man, except it be exhibited as the remedy for all his spiritual maladies. The life-blood must flow warm at the heart, in order to cherish every extremity of the frame. The shape and lineaments of a man, without warmth and circulation, are of no avail. Around the living substance of Christianity, temporal blessings will be collected, as comeliness and form and flowing garments around the person of a prince. But remove the substance, and the appendages vanish with it. If you would have the secondary benefits of religion, you must cultivate the primary ones. If you would have its palpable good effects in implanting the principles on which national welfare depends; if you would have its good effects in banishing enormous vice, mitigating every moral evil, and conferring substantial benefits on your people, you must have a vital Christianity, pregnant with its first virtue, founded on the doctrine of the fall, glorying in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, and honouring the Holy Spirit of grace. This will give you the "promise of the life that is to come; with that of the life which now is." But if Christianity be stripped of her peculiar attributes, if she be separated from the person and sacrifice of the Son of God, and the operations of his Spirit, if she be employed by the artful and enterprising, as the instrument of

spiritual tyranny, or by the worldly and speculative, as the means of promoting civilization merely, she resents the indignity, she claps her wings and takes her flight, leaving nothing but a base and sanctimonious hypocrisy in her room.<sup>15</sup> We must take the whole of the divine doctrine, in order to share permanently any part of its sacred effects. Then it is of sovereign virtue; then it is productive of the highest as well as lowest scale of blessings; then it is true to all its simple, and yet inestimable designs, whether it be viewed in its minutest effects on the regulation of an individual action, or in its widest operations in the salvation of mankind. Thus it resembles all the works of God in nature, "which are not like the puny productions of human workmanship, which serve only one particular purpose; but are capable of being applied to ten thousand different uses: thus, in the midst of complication, preserving a grand simplicity, and thereby bearing the unambiguous stamp of divine authority; like the principle of gravitation, which, while it is subservient to all the purposes of common life, keeps at the same time the stars in their courses, and sustains the harmony of worlds."<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Dewar.<sup>16</sup> Wilberforce.

## LECTURE XII.

## THE INSPIRATION OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

2 TIM. iii. 14—17.

*But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them. And that from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*

WE concluded in the last lecture the series of arguments for the divine authority of the Christian religion. The Holy Scriptures are proved to contain a revelation from God to man. We now proceed to consider the aid and guidance of the Holy Spirit afforded to the sacred authors, by which their books are constituted the word of God, the unerring standard of truth, the divinely-inspired writings—or, in the terms of the text, *Γραφή θεόπνευστος*, “the scripture given by inspiration of God.”

We might have conceived, indeed, that no question

could have been raised on this topic. As the Christian religion has been proved to be divine, and to have been committed to writing by those who received the revelation and first promulgated it with the attestation of miraculous powers, we might have supposed that no doubt would have existed concerning the character of what they thus wrote. If the scriptures are the records of the Christian religion, and were written by the Apostles, (as we have fully proved,) then undoubtedly those records have the same inspiration as the other communications made by the same persons, from the same authority, and on the same great subject. And thus the case was viewed for sixteen or seventeen centuries. The New Testament was universally considered as the infallible word of God. It is only in modern days that its plenary inspiration has been disputed. Many considerable writers on the evidences of Christianity of late, have satisfied themselves with proving its divine authority generally, but have tacitly, and most inconsistently, given up or denied the infallibility of the books in which it is recorded. They speak of authenticity, veracity, credibility, but not inspiration. Some have limited the assistance of the Spirit to the prophetic parts. Others have extended it to the doctrinal, but excluded the historical. Whilst many have lowered the whole notion of inspiration to a mere aid occasionally afforded to the sacred penmen. Thus the impression left on the minds of their readers has been, that the Bible is authentic indeed, and credible, and contains a revelation from God ; but that it was indited by good and pious men only, with little more of accuracy than would belong to them as faithful historians. An intermixture of human infirmity and error is thus by no means excluded ; and the scriptures are considered as the work of fallible writers, doing their best, and entitled in all their main statements to full belief, but not under that immediate and plenary influence of the Holy Spirit, which renders

all they write concerning religion, the unerring word of God.

The question, therefore, before us is of unspeakable importance.

It is true, that even on the lowest ground that can be taken, the conscience is bound to receive and obey the scriptures. If they were written only with the same degree of fidelity as ordinary faithful histories, no man could reasonably reject them. The chief facts are so prominent, and the doctrines and duties are so repeatedly and fully detailed, and the whole style and manner are so perspicuous and forcible, that they would guide every sincere inquirer into the way of truth. No man could be misled who came to them honestly for religious instruction.

But still, such is the ignorance and weakness of man, that we must not esteem lightly the declarations of Almighty God as to the infallible inspiration under which the books of scripture were written. If it be once granted that they are, in the revelation which they communicate, alloyed with error, however small, an opening is made for the admission of every imaginable corruption. For who can guarantee from mistake even the best and wisest of men, in their conceptions of a religion so new, so mysterious, as that of the Bible, and in the representations they have given of it in their writings? Who is to distinguish their incidental errors, and separate them from the facts and doctrines with which they are interwoven? If the Bible be not divinely inspired throughout, we are still in want of an infallible standard, to which all other books and instructions of every kind may be referred, with which they may be compared, and by which they may be judged.

Here, then, we must make a decided stand.

The question is, in what sense are the Holy Scriptures said to contain a divine revelation? Is it merely because the sacred penmen communicate a revelation



received from God, according to their best judgment, and of course with some intermixture of human frailty? Or is it because these penmen communicate a revelation under the superintendence of the Spirit of God, so as to have been preserved from every kind and degree of error relating to the religion, and to have indited books, in the strictest sense of the terms, under the guidance of the Holy Ghost?

Now nothing can be more easy than the determination of this question, because we have arrived at a part of our general argument which admits of an immediate appeal to the sacred writers themselves, and which renders their decisions authoritative and final. A divine revelation they received—a divine authority is at the foundation of all their communications. We have only therefore to study the books themselves. We have only to open the pages of the New Testament, and see what is there stated upon the subject. All previous matters have been proved—authenticity, credibility, miraculous works, a prophetic spirit, a propagation of Christianity supported by the immediate interference of God, copious good effects which proclaim the author from whom they flow. What then do the writers of the holy books teach us upon the subject of inspiration? What can we reasonably infer from the testimony of our Lord and his Apostles concerning it?

This is the one simple point which now demands our attention: and in order to settle it,

We appeal to the unquestionable inspiration of the **OLD TESTAMENT**.

We appeal to the **PROMISE** which our Lord gave to the Apostles, and the **GIFTS AND QUALIFICATIONS** they received in consequence.

We appeal to **THE CLAIMS** which the writers themselves made.

We appeal to the testimony of the **FIRST CHRISTIANS**.

These particulars we shall illustrate in the present lecture.

The consideration of them must draw us into some length, but the whole influence of Christianity, practically speaking, rests on the scriptural adjustment of them, especially in a day like the present.

### I. THE INSPIRATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT MAY BE INFERRED FROM THAT OF THE OLD.

1. Need I remind you that our Lord and his apostles most distinctly assert the plenary inspiration of the Old Testament? Need I tell you that they recognize the whole of the canonical writings of the Jews in their threefold division of THE LAW, THE PROPHETS, and THE PSALMS, and attest and authorize separately, almost every book of each division? Need I remind you that what Moses, for instance, wrote in the Pentateuch, is expressly declared by Christ to have been spoken by God himself?—"Have ye never read that which was SPOKEN TO YOU BY GOD, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?" Need I remind you that what David wrote in the Psalms, is plainly said to have been spoken by the Holy Ghost, to have been written in the Spirit—uttered by the very mouth of God? "The Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake.—How doth David in spirit call him Lord!—Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said,"—according to the Psalmist's own declaration, "the Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue." Need I tell you that the prophet Isaiah is described as speaking under the immediate guidance of the Holy Spirit—"Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet, saying?"

And what does St. Peter teach us universally as to the inspiration of the holy prophets? Does he not

distinctly, and in so many words assert, that they delivered was by the Spirit of Christ sp in them; and that they wrote—holy men a were—not by their own will or judgment, but were guided, borne along, moved by the Holy “ Searching what or what manner of time th of Christ which was in them did signify, when tified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and th that should follow.—The prophecy came not time by the will of man, but holy men of God as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”

And what can be more completely decisiv the language of St. Paul in the text, where, en the terms to the utmost latitude, but und having an especial reference to the Old Tes he declares that “all scripture is given by insp of God”—breathed, communicated, inspired in vine manner into the minds of the sacred write


This then, in fact, determines the whole q We are inquiring whether the New Testame vinely inspired. We take it for granted, in quiry, that the Old and the New Testame equally authentic and credible, are of the same authority, and equally consist of books written instruction and guidance of the church. W find that the first division is expressly and rep declared to have been written by this divine insp What then follows? Is it not that the second also was composed under the same guidance can it for a moment be imagined that such as was given to Moses and the prophets, as to their writings absolutely free from error in ever that relates to the revelation they contain; a the evangelists and apostles were left destitute same assistance, in their still more important w

It is true we have no books of an additior later dispensation to testify to the inspiration

New Testament, as the New doth to that of the Old. The case admits not of that particular proof.<sup>1</sup> Nor is it required. The writers of the New Testament brought the same miraculous credentials of their mission, with the penmen of the first Testament. If the credentials, then, of the economy of Moses included that inspired aid by which the Old Testament was written, we may assure ourselves that the case was the same with the credentials of the economy established by the only-begotten Son of the Father.

This consideration acquires greater force, when we recollect that the New Testament dispensation, surpasses in all spiritual privileges and gifts, the Old. "Among them that were born of women, there had not risen a greater than John the Baptist. He was a prophet, yea, and more than a prophet." And yet—so much better are the promises, so much higher the gifts, so much clearer the light, so much greater the freedom, and especially so much more copious the effusion of the Spirit under the New Testament—"he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." . . . "For if the ministration of death was glorious, how shall not the ministration of the Spirit exceed in glory?" If there were inspired writers under the Mosaic economy—which was temporary, of which many blessings were earthly and figurative, and under which the Holy Ghost was not given, in the emphatical sense of the term—has not the Christian inspired writers also? If the Old Testament had oracular responses at one period, and an extraordinary dispensation of Providence attending it through all its course; with a succession of divine prophets and teachers and continued miraculous powers, age after age; though it was, after all, a dispensation of a confined range of influence and exertion—are there not inspired teachers under the Christian dispensation?—a dispensation

<sup>1</sup> The testimony of the first Christians, and early Fathers, will be given hereafter.



universal and permanent, where all the blessings are spiritual—the last dispensation of God to man, and the fulfilment and accomplishment of the Jewish;<sup>2</sup> under which the abundant effusion of the Spirit is bestowed; where, however, all extraordinary attendant aids are withdrawn—oracular responses, prophets, miraculous powers, the immediate government of the Almighty—and the whole church is left to this one single external source of truth in all successive ages? The luminous and permanent dispensation of Christ has surely a light at least equal to that of the dark and preparatory dispensation of Moses. It is not night to us as to an inspired scripture, when the legal economy had the day shining full upon it. We are not without writings, with the will of God infallibly communicated in them, when the Jews had an unerring revelation of that will. We are not left to rely on the credit of books written merely by persons of sincerity and piety, whilst the Jews had, and still have, divinely inspired scriptures. No. “We have not so learned Christ.” The case is perfectly decisive. If we had no other arguments to adduce, we infer with undoubted certainty, that as the Old Testament was written under the superintendence and inspiration of God, the New was composed also with the same aid, and comes commended with the same features of infallible and unerring truth.

2. But this is not all. Our inference is strengthened by the distinct recognition of the New Testament as of equal authority with the Old.

The writers of the Christian books speak with the same authority as those of the Jewish, and evidently consider them as standing upon precisely the same footing of inspiration. If the prophets began with the solemn formula, “Thus saith the Lord;” the apostles begin with the same claim of a divine command;

<sup>2</sup> “The law made nothing perfect.” Heb. vii. 19.

“ Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God our Saviour.”

If the authors of the Old Testament denounce the judgments of God against those who disobey their authority, if they demand implicit obedience to their decisions, and in every part of their writings exhibit the unequivocal marks of divine inspiration, the authors of the New Testament do the same.

We shall hereafter consider the direct claims of the apostles to divine inspiration, independently of any reference to the Old Testament. We now assert merely that their writings are considered by themselves as equal in authority, and as having the same measure of divine inspiration, as those of Moses and the prophets.

Further, when the apostles speak of the books of the first covenant, they class those of the second with them, as constituting together the one unerring standard of divine truth. “ Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets.”—“ That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Saviour.”

Again, they cite without distinction the Old and New Testament by the peculiar and decisive name of scripture. “ For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn; and the labourer is worthy of his reward :” where the first part of the authoritative citation is taken from the law of Moses; the second from the gospel of St. Luke.<sup>3</sup>

And yet more fully in our text, the apostle classes the Old and New Testament in common under the title of DIVINELY-INSPIRED SCRIPTURE. For though undoubtedly, as I have said, he more expressly refers to the Old Testament, yet he appears also by the general cast and comprehension of the whole passage to

<sup>3</sup> 1 Tim. v. 18; Deut. xxv. 4; Luke x. 7.

include those books of the New which were then extant, (which was almost the whole volume,) as well as those that might be added to the canon by himself and his fellow-apostles. For he first addresses Timothy, as having "from a child known the holy scriptures;" and exhorts him to "continue in what he had learned and been assured of." He then joins this "with faith in Christ Jesus, as able to make him wise unto salvation." Surely this directs him to the gospels and epistles, of which some probably had then been published ten or twenty years.<sup>4</sup>

But this becomes more evident, if we consider that the apostle, after thus speaking of faith in Christ Jesus, goes on to say, enlarging his terms, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God;" as if he intended purposely to comprehend those books which expounded the life and doctrine of the Son of God, in whom Timothy was to believe. He next declares that the effects of "doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness," would flow from it; which are surely, in the latitude in which they are here taken, the inseparable adjuncts of the brighter light of the New Testament. Much more, when the apostle adds, "That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works," a result which can only be produced by the last revelation of the Almighty. Bishop Warburton accordingly thinks that "St. Paul, in the general proposition that 'all scripture is given by inspiration of God,' necessarily includes the scripture of the New Testament; what it predicates of all scripture, taking in the New as well as the Old; as well that which was to be written, as

<sup>4</sup> The Second Epistle of Timothy is of the date of A. D. 66; St. Matthew's Gospel of A. D. 38. The First Epistle to the Thessalonians A. D. 54. Timothy may be supposed to have been born about A. D. 46. The whole New Testament was extant in A. D. 66, except the books written by St. John and St. Jude.

that which was already collected into a canon. For the term **SCRIPTURE**, as the context leads us to understand it, is general, and means a religious rule, perfect in its direction for the conduct of human life in belief and practice; it being under this idea, he recommends the scriptures to Timothy. The assertion, therefore, is universal, and amounts to this, That divine inspiration is an essential quality of every scripture, which constitutes the **LAW OR RULE** of a religion coming from God.”\*

But, if any doubt rest on the above argument, it is removed by St. Peter, who calls the epistles of St. Paul by the solemn title of Scriptures, considers them as parallel with the writings of the prophets, declares they were indited by a wisdom more than human, and classes them with the inspired writings which the ignorant and unstable wrest. And he does all this incidentally, as if the inspiration of the New Testament were a point of acknowledged truth. He does it also when writing to “stir up the pure minds of the first Christians, who knew, and were established in the truths of the gospel;” and, with the view of their being “able, after his decease; to have his instructions always in remembrance.” He does it further, after he had expressly declared, that “the gospel had been preached, with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven.” And he concludes his epistle with the remark-

\* Works, viii. 271. Besides Bishop Warburton, I am indebted to Bishops Horsley, Tomline, and Van Mildert, especially to the last; also to the works of Calamy, Horberry, Abbadie, Boyle’s *Style of Scripture*, Williams, and Blackall’s *Boyle’s Lectures*, Campbell, Jortin, Bennet, Hartley, Jaquetot, Hey’s *Lectures*, Houteville, Jenkins, Seed, Gregory, Dick, Benson, Franks. But the works most practical, and which have given me most satisfaction, are Lamotte, Dr. Lowth, Doddridge, and Scott in his preface to his *Commentary*. Perhaps, if I were to select one work only, it would be Lamotte’s *Inspiration of the New Testament asserted and explained*. 1694.



able words, "I have written briefly, exhorting testifying that this is the true grace of God in which ye stand." Surrounded with such concomitant demonstrations, we find the following language: "Acc that the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation, as our beloved brother Paul also, according to WISDOM GIVEN UNTO HIM, hath written unto ; as also in all his epistles, speaking of these things which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable, wrest, as do also THE OTHER SCRIPTURES, unto their destruction." Thus we have the divinely-inspired authors of the Christian revelation, endowed accordingly with miraculous gifts, bearing a solemn testimony to the inspiration of the New Testament scriptures and classing them with those of the Old. Can one hesitate, then, to admit, that our Christian brethren are, strictly speaking, inspired of the Holy Ghost? But to proceed. We not only certainly infer inspiration of the New Testament from that of the Old; but we appeal, in further proof of our position

II. To the PROMISE MADE BY OUR LORD TO APOSTLES, AND TO THE GIFTS AND QUALIFICATIONS which they received in consequence, on the day of Pentecost.

1. For did not our Lord's promise of the Spirit directly relate to the qualifications which were to render them infallible teachers of the Christian doctrine? Did it not especially comprise the Holy Spirit "Spirit of truth," who should "guide them into truth," who should "glorify Christ," who should "take of the things of Christ, and show them unto them;" who should "bring all things to their remembrance, whatsoever he had said to them;" who should "teach them all things, and show them the way to come, and abide with them for ever?"—who, in short, should be the great COMFORTER, ADVOCATE,

and Instructor of the church? Observe, I entreat you, that the Holy Ghost is not here promised as a Spirit of miracles, but as a SPIRIT OF TRUTH—an expression three times repeated, and which, connected with the other numerous terms just cited, manifestly includes an unerring direction in the exposition of the truth of the Christian religion. Further, the Spirit's "abiding with them for ever," must undoubtedly import constant operation, without change or intermission, whenever they should be engaged in the execution of their office. Again, the Spirit's being "another Comforter," Adviser, or Advocate, to supply their Master's personal presence, to "glorify him," and "to take of the things which were his, and show them unto them," must imply plenary inspiration and direction. The assurance, moreover, that by the agency of this Comforter their Lord "would not leave them comfortless," destitute, or orphans, but "come unto them," must include more than this: it must import that they should speak and write under the immediate guidance of the Spirit of their Master and Lord, as if he himself was still with them, instructed them as to every part of their doctrine, and indited every word they uttered. And accordingly, that they might be prepared to receive much new information in the mysteries of the gospel, our Saviour expressly adds, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now; howbeit, when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth."

Thus this illustrious promise embraces the very qualifications which would constitute infallible doctors and teachers of the church.

But we have, further, a description of the extent of assistance implied in this promise, by a declaration of Jesus in reference to an occasion, important indeed, but apparently far less so, than when rules of faith were to be drawn up for all ages. "When they bring you unto the synagogues, and unto magistrates and

powers, take ye no thought how, or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say. For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say; for it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you." Such is the nature of inspiration—it is the Spirit of God speaking in or by an apostle.<sup>6</sup>

We have also a specimen of the actual fulfilment of one important branch of the promise, even before the day of Pentecost. "Then opened he their understanding that they might understand the scriptures; and beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he showed them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself."

But, what further illustrates the import and force of this promise of the Holy Ghost, is the commission given by Christ to the apostles, which rested entirely upon the accomplishment of it, and could not have been executed without it. "I give unto thee," said Jesus to one of the apostles, Peter, in the name of the rest, "the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven.—And he breathed on them, and said, Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them, and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained." Words, undoubtedly including, and indeed chiefly referring to the doctrine delivered by the apostles inspired by the Holy Ghost, according to which, sins are ministerially remitted or retained, and the state of all men in respect of acceptance or condemnation, is and will be finally determined; and which supposes such an assistance of the Spirit in the discharge of their office, as to exclude absolutely all error or mistake.

Again, the last words of our Lord confirmed all the

<sup>6</sup> Matt. x. 19; Mark xiii. 11; Luke xii. 11, 12.

preceding expectations of spiritual authority and inspiration. "All power is given unto me in heaven and earth, go ye therefore and teach all nations.—Go ye into all the world; and preach the gospel to every creature; baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.—He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; and he that believeth not, shall be damned.—And lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." If then any, the least error, as to the doctrines or precepts of Christianity, is found in the holy scriptures, this promise, and the commission founded on it, have so far been defeated in their main design. There is no absolutely infallible standard of salvation or condemnation; and the divine Saviour, instead of being with his church to the end of the world, has failed it in the very first age, and in the most critical of all points, the inditing of those sacred rules and canons of faith and practice, by which every subsequent age was to be governed.

2. But what gifts and qualifications did the apostles actually receive in consequence of this great promise of our Lord?

This will furnish a most conclusive argument. We have only to look at the apostles, first in themselves, and then when the gifts of the Spirit had qualified them for their office, to be convinced of the full inspiration of all they spoke and wrote.

Behold the weak, dismayed, timid fishermen of Galilee, who had fled at their Master's apprehension, and had with difficulty been persuaded of his resurrection. The day of Pentecost arrives. They are suddenly endowed with new and surprising powers, and assume a new character. The house shakes where they are assembled. The divine Spirit rests like a lambent celestial flame, upon each of them. Instantly they speak with new tongues. Unlearned and igno-

rant men as they were, and discouraged and cowardly as they had proved themselves, they discourse with the greatest readiness and propriety, and with a boldness which nothing can daunt, in every dialect and tongue of the assembled crowds. No language is unknown to them. Latin, Greek, Arabic, Coptic, Persian, the first rudiments of which they had never learned, are familiar to their use. A new courage, discernment, vigour, knowledge of the prophetic word, skill in argument, fortitude in bearing testimony to the resurrection of their Lord, appear in their discourses. The gifts of healing attend them, for the demonstration of their credentials to others; the gifts of wisdom, and knowledge, and the discerning of spirits, for giving them a full and comprehensive perception of the Christian doctrine, and the faculty of teaching it with unerring truth.


Here we see the promise of the Saviour fully accomplished. This forms the link of all our arguments. The Old Testament was inspired; the New stands on the same footing; the promise and commission of our Lord imply full superintendence; the gifts bestowed on the apostles are precisely adapted to constitute them infallible teachers. The qualifications correspond with the offices to be fulfilled.

The apostles go forth. Let us follow the steps of any one, St. Paul, for example, who was so soon added to their company, and became the great doctor of the Gentiles. He is miraculously converted from a fiery persecutor to a meek and devoted disciple. He receives a full and distinct revelation of the gospel, to him at that time unknown, by the immediate inspiration of Christ. He joins the Christian church. He turns to the Gentiles. A heavenly vision calls him over into Europe. He performs every where his miraculous deeds: diseases fly before him: devils are cast out. His motions are guided from place to place by a divine oracle; Elymas is struck blind for oppo-

sing him; his bands are loosed by an earthquake; his vigour and health are instantaneously restored, when he had been stoned and taken up for dead at Lystra; his life is saved in a shipwreck, and for his sake nearly three hundred fellow-passengers are rescued with him from a watery grave.

In the midst of these miracles, he preaches the gospel, he founds churches, he traverses the provinces of the Roman empire; he argues with the Jews, and proves from the scriptures that Jesus is the Christ; he convinces the Gentiles, and exposes their idolatries; the Holy Spirit accompanies his labours; multitudes are converted; miraculous gifts are conferred by the imposition of his hands. He executes for thirty years his commission to evangelize, instruct, make disciples of all nations. He uses every means likely to attain his end. He finds that his young converts need to be further instructed: that errors creep into the churches whilst he is absent. He hears that false apostles corrupt the faith, or that Jewish converts impose a yoke upon the Gentiles. He writes letters to the churches, on the highest subjects of his ministry. Is it not then absurd—I was going to say, impious—to conceive that he should be left and deserted of God, who was at the very time surrounding him with the tokens of his extraordinary presence and care, to mingle error with his most solemn instructions, and human frailty with divine truth?

It is allowed by all who receive the Christian revelation in all its parts, that the gifts of the Holy Ghost conferred an infallibility upon the doctrine of the apostle, as he preached it to Jew and Gentile: and surely this infallibility extended to every thing relating to the diffusion of the religion which he and his fellow-apostles propagated. If the Holy Ghost exalted and elevated their minds in their apostolical function generally, much more would his gifts attend them when inditing those books which were to be the abiding



they use such language as manifestly asserts a direct and plenary inspiration in all their epistles ; if they claim the implicit obedience of mankind to their instructions as to the direct word of God, we cannot doubt that they were assisted and conducted by the full superintendence and suggestions of the Holy Ghost.

We begin, then, with the first letter addressed by the College of Apostles to the Brethren of the Gentiles. This brief address on a temporary subject, will give us a pledge of what aid they received in their writings designed for every age. In the course, then, of this short letter, they use, without any mark of its being an unexpected circumstance, these words, "for it seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us." Hence the apostolical epistles are inspired by the Holy Ghost.

Open, in the next place, the first of the epistles to the churches generally, to the Romans for instance ; what is the authority which it assumes ? How does it begin and close ? "Paul a servant of Jesus Christ called to be an Apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, by whom we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name ; grace be to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." The Apostle, you see, is separated unto the gospel ; he receives, not only the apostleship, but grace for that apostleship ; all nations are required to receive with implicit faith his instructions ; every word he writes is as from Christ himself. And how does he conclude his epistle ? "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all, Amen. Now unto him that is of power to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret since the world began ; but now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of

Besides, we are to recollect, that the apostles perpetually appeal in their epistles to what they had taught, as corresponding with what they wrote, and confirming it. They speak of their preaching and writing indifferently as the same gospel. "Remember ye not, that when I was yet with you, how I told you of these things?—We write none other things unto you, than what you read or acknowledge, and I trust you shall acknowledge even unto the end.—Hold fast the form of sound words which thou hast heard of me." Such is the language which marks the identity of their discourses and letters. But this identity is definitely settled by the authority of God himself. Every one of the attestations in the New Testament to the full inspiration of the Old, as the words of the Holy Ghost, is applied indifferently to what was spoken by Moses, and David, and Isaiah, and the other prophets, and to what was written by them; nay, though the passages, as cited, were of necessity taken from the written canon of the Jewish church, they are expressly described as spoken by God, uttered by the mouth of God, said or declared by the Holy Ghost.

narratives in which their doctrine is conveyed, is nearly the same thing as to deny their inspiration in general. You will perhaps, think it incredible, that they who were assisted by the divine Spirit when they preached, should be deserted by that Spirit when they committed what they had preached to writing. You will think it improbable, that they who were endowed with the gift of discerning spirits, should be endowed with no gift of discerning the truth of facts. You will recollect one instance in which St. Peter detected a falsehood by the light of inspiration; and you will, perhaps, be inclined to think, that it could be of no less importance to the church, that the apostles and evangelists should be enabled to detect falsehoods in the history of our Saviour's life, than that St. Peter should be enabled to detect Ananias's lie, about the sale of his estate. You will think it unlikely, that they who were led by the Spirit into all truth, should be permitted to lead the whole church for many ages into error."—Sermon xxxiv. Luke i. 28.



Further, the epistles were chiefly addressed to the newly-founded churches, to guard them, as we have just observed, against seducers; to correct rising errors, to communicate a full knowledge of the gospel, to establish them in the faith, to call them back from false teachers, to the doctrine and teaching of the apostles; to remind them of what they had heard from their fathers in Christ at their first conversion; to be the guide and standard of truth, after the decease of the apostles; to supply, in short, the personal presence and authority of the evangelists and apostles in every age. The epistles, therefore, are silent preachers, representatives of those who wrote them; summaries of their oral instructions; sermons adapted to the most important emergencies of the churches, and delivered permanently by pen and ink, instead of, on any one occasion, by actual bodily presence and voice. But what would all this have availed, if the slightest suspicion of inaccuracy could have been justly imputed to these communications? What disputes would have been adjusted? What errors corrected? What agitations calmed? What authoritative determinations concluded? What measures of peace and truth restored? What standard erected for future ages?

The churches, also, then abounded with persons endued themselves with miraculous gifts; themselves speaking with tongues, themselves illuminated with the word of wisdom and knowledge, themselves capable of prophecy and interpreting tongues, and discerning spirits. To have addressed, therefore, to converts thus gifted, human and fallible epistles, would have been to send an uninspired writing to an illuminated and inspired body of Christians.


Would the Corinthians, for instance, divided amongst themselves, vain of the spiritual gifts with which they abounded, and distracted by false teachers, have listened for one moment to the exhortations and reproofs

of the Apostle, if they had not known that "Christ was speaking in him," and that miraculous punishments would visit the disobedient? In fact, the very "unction from the Holy One by which the first Christians knew all things, and needed not," comparatively speaking, "that any should teach them," but were enabled to "try the spirits whether they were of God;" would most assuredly have detected a defective canon of faith, and induced them to refuse obedience to a rule inferior in any respects, to that which their own recollection of the apostolical discourses, and their own comparison of the Old Testament with the gospels, might in some points have supplied.

The inspiration, then, of the instructions, oral and written, of the apostles, was full and complete, in consequence of the abundant gifts of the Holy Ghost; and absolutely excluded all intermixture of human frailty with their divine communications.

III. But I appeal to what THE APOSTLES THEMSELVES CLAIM UPON THIS SUBJECT. I appeal to THEIR OWN assertions of the divine inspiration of their writings.

Bear in mind the acknowledged facts of the case. The apostles received a revelation from heaven to communicate to mankind; they place their books on the same footing, and claim for them the same authority, as the divinely-inspired writings of the Old Testament. They are endowed with an exuberant supply of miraculous gifts according to the promise of their Lord. They are accompanied in their progress in promulgating the gospel, with incessant demonstrations of the Holy Ghost. They are not merely authentic and credible witnesses; they are persons divinely-authorized, divinely-gifted, divinely-inspired. All this we now take for admitted, because it has been fully and distinctly proved. If, therefore,



doubt, the apostle declares this in terms which cannot be misunderstood, "Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual;" or as some would render it, adapting spiritual expressions to spiritual things. And then in the close of the chapter, when with a noble freedom in a consciousness of the distinguished character he bore, he had put the question to the whole world "Who hath known the mind of the Lord?" He triumphantly adds, "But we have the mind of Christ."

These are specimens of the assertion of direct inspiration, extending even to the words in which he was to convey the divine message. But observe, next the authority with which he brings every pretence to the test, and proposes the admission of his inspiration as the proof of the possession of spiritual gifts, and denounces miraculous judgments on the disobedient "If any man think himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write unto you, are the commandments of the Lord I told you before, and now tell you, as if I were present, and being absent, now I write unto them which heretofore have sinned, and to all others, that if I come again, I will not spare, since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, which to you ward is no weak, but is mighty in you."

Notice, further, the carefulness and conscientiousness of the apostle in the discharge of his function, so that if on any point he had no special communication he avowed it, and thus doubly confirmed the full inspiration of all the rest of his writings. "But I speak this by permission, not by commandment. Unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord. To the rest speak I, not the Lord. Concerning virgins, I have no commandment from the Lord."

Again, the solemn adjuration to the Galatians to

adhere strictly to his instructions and doctrine; demands our especial attention. On a particular point of external discipline, such as the marriage of Christian converts under certain cases, he had received no injunction, and he mentions the exception. But on all the truths of the Christian revelation, he had received the most positive and plenary commandment. When he approaches the doctrines of Christianity, how does he speak? "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you unto the grace of Christ, unto another gospel.—Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel to you than that ye have received, let him be accursed—I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me, was not after man; for I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ—It pleased God to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the Gentiles?" Now to what purpose is all this, if the epistle which it contains, and which proceeds to correct the errors that had crept into the church, was itself fallible and uninspired?

But I will no longer press quotations, which may be multiplied to almost any extent.

To pass on to the writings of St. John. What, I ask, is the import of such passages as the following, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the word of life—That which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you—The anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and

even as it hath taught you, abide in him—Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God : because many false prophets are gone out into the world—We are of God : he that knoweth God, heareth us ; he that is not of God, heareth not us ; hereby know we the Spirit of truth, and the spirit of error—I testify to every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book : And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things that are written in this book.” I will not insult the understanding of any hearer, by asking him, whether such declarations are consistent with a fallible and intermixed representation of the Christian faith ? Or whether each of them does not imply, as the apostles were divinely commissioned, an inspired and absolutely perfect exposition of that faith ?

Nothing can be added, I think, to this accumulated proof, except

IV. The uniform testimony of THE EARLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH from the time of the contemporaries of the apostles. I should not, indeed, adduce this as an independent proof of the inspiration of the New Testament. The testimony of the first ages of Christianity to the authenticity and credibility of the sacred books is incontrovertible, because this rested on plain matters of fact, which took place under their own eyes, and where they could not be mistaken. But the inspiration of scripture is a doctrine or sentiment, so far as the Fathers are concerned, and not a fact of which they were eye-witnesses. Still, if their testimony to the belief of the universal church on this subject is distinct and uniform, it must be allowed to

have great weight in confirmation of the arguments deduced from the Holy Scriptures; just as, in the contrary case, if their uniform testimony were, that the first Christians did not account the New Testament inspired, we should naturally be led to examine with more care our previous conclusions. The testimony of the Fathers against or beside the scriptures, is to be at once rejected; but their evidence in concurrence with the scriptures, is, under certain circumstances, of great importance. And what were they more likely to know, than whether the New Testament was accounted to be written by the apostles under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, or not? Was not this the first point which would be considered as fundamental in the propagation of Christianity? Would they not begin with ascertaining the infallible correctness and truth of the sacred books?

What, then, do the Fathers declare as to the opinion of the church in the first centuries, on the subject of the inspiration of the scriptures?

1. First, as the sacred writers of the New Testament cited passages from the Old Testament with the solemn title of *SCRIPTURE*, without any addition, as expressive of the inspiration of the books of the Jewish canon; so the Christian Fathers, coëval with the apostles, constantly quote the writings of the New Testament under the same name.

2. Again, the other titles which they familiarly attribute to the New Testament, almost all imply their divine inspiration. They call them, "The Word of God, The Voice of God, The Oracles of Heaven, The Oracles of the Holy Ghost," and especially they apply to them the expression which we have already noticed, as containing the sum of the whole argument, *γραφὴ θεόπνευστος*, divinely-inspired scripture.

3. Further, the distinction which the ancient Fa-

thers made between canonical and apocryphal books, turned on this very point of inspiration. They accounted other writings, however true upon the whole and edifying, not canonical, because not inspired by the Holy Ghost.

4. Then as to the innumerable passages in which they speak their own sentiments, and that of the church, on the subject.

Hear, first, Clemens Romanus, Bishop of Rome, (A. D. 91—110,) a contemporary with the apostles, to whom we have frequently referred already. "The apostles," says he, "preached the gospel, being filled with the Holy Ghost—the scriptures are the true words of the Spirit—Paul wrote to the Corinthians things true by the aid of the Spirit—he, being divinely-inspired, admonished them, by an epistle, concerning himself and Cephas and Apollos."

Justin Martyr (A. D. 89—164) says, that "the gospels were written by men full of the Holy Ghost."

Irenæus (A. D. 97—202) declares that "all the apostles received the gospel by divine revelation—that the scriptures were dictated by the Spirit of God—and that therefore it is wickedness to contradict them, and sacrilege to make any alteration in them."

Theophilus, (A. D. 168—181,) citing the authors of the Old and New Testament, says, "that both the one and the other spake, being inspired by one and the same Spirit."

"These things," he also observes, "the Holy Scriptures teach us, and all who were moved by the Holy Spirit."

Clemens Alexandrinus (A. D. 191) says, "that the whole scriptures are the law of God, and that they are all divine, and that the evangelists and apostles wrote by the same Spirit that inspired the apostles."

Tertullian, (A. D. 150—220,) in several passages, attributes the scriptures to the Spirit, and once ex-

pressly says, that "the majesty of the Holy Ghost suggested what St. Paul wrote."<sup>8</sup>

Origen (A. D. 230) teaches, that "the scriptures proceeded from the Holy Spirit, that there is not one tittle in them but what expresses a divine wisdom, that there is nothing in the law, or the prophets, or the gospels, or the epistles, which did not proceed from the fulness of the Spirit, that we ought, with all the faithful, to say, that the scriptures are divinely-inspired; that the gospels are admitted as divine in all the churches of God, and that the scriptures are no other than the organs of God."

The Emperor Constantine wrote unto the Council of Nice, (A. D. 323,) and called the scriptures "the doctrine of the Holy Ghost in writing."

An ancient writer in Eusebius, (A. D. 315,) says, "that they who corrupt the sacred scriptures, either do not believe that the Holy Spirit uttered the divine scriptures, and then they are infidels; or think themselves wiser than the Spirit, and so seem to be possessed."<sup>9</sup>

Can it be necessary to pursue our quotations further? Can anything be more clear than the inference from such testimony? In short, to admit the full divine inspiration of the New Testament was, in the early church, the test of Christianity. The question then was, whether the religion itself came from God; but no doubt was raised whether the books were infallibly superintended and dictated by the Holy Spirit.

And this is, in truth, the real question to be determined now. An opponent may, if he is able, controvert the arguments we have adduced for the divine authority of the Christian religion; he may refuse his assent to the miraculous testimony, the fulfilment of

<sup>8</sup> Et ideo Majestas Spiritus Sancti, perspicax ejusmodi sensuum, et in ipsa ad Thessalonicenses Epistola, suggerit.—*De Resur: Carnis*, c. 24.

<sup>9</sup> Lamotte; Lardner; Dodd. Lect.



the scheme of prophecy, the proofs from the propagation and good effects of the gospel ; that is, he may throw us back on our former lectures. This would be fair and equitable, if he has anything solid to advance. But after he has admitted, as every candid inquirer must, the miracles and prophecies and divine original of Christianity, after he has allowed the extraordinary powers conferred on the apostles, after he has examined and ratified all their credentials and qualifications for establishing a new religion, and for overthrowing all existing modes of error and superstition, it is too late to turn round and deny the full inspiration and infallible truth of the books written under the immediate assistance, and with the authority, and in the name, of Almighty God.

The additional confirmation of this evidence from the character and internal structure of the sacred books, and the consideration of some practical deductions from the doctrine of the inspiration, must be deferred till the next lecture.

In the mean time, let what has been advanced determine the young Christian, according to our text, "to continue" with greater firmness "in the things that he has learned and been assured of." Let him study with more entire submission of heart those holy writings which are "able to make him wise unto salvation." Let him unite more of lively "faith in Christ Jesus" with his knowledge, as the only means of turning it to its proper use and highest end. Let him settle it in his mind, as a fundamental principle of divine revelation, that "all scripture," without any exception, was "given by inspiration of God ;" was divinely breathed or inspired by the Holy Ghost, and constitutes the one perfect and infallible canon of religious truth. Let him employ every part of it, according to its true design, "for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."

And thus let him, as a man taught of God himself by his inspired word, become continually more matured and "perfect;" and prove, by his whole conduct, that he is "thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

## LECTURE XIII.

PLAN OF INSPIRATION OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES—AND REVIEW OF THE WHOLE ARGUMENT DERIVED FROM THE EXTERNAL EVIDENCES.

1 CORINTHIANS ii. 10—13.

*But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom speaketh, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.*

To the convincing arguments for the full inspiration of the holy scripture, which are adduced in our last lecture, nothing need be added. The proofs of every kind are numerous, forcible, conclusive. We proceed to advert to the character and internal structure of the sacred books themselves, in order to discover the plan

of the divine inspiration, and trace out something of the general method which God was pleased to take, in directing the minds of the respective sacred penmen.

For there is apparently much of the agency of man. The writers are like ourselves; they think, they speak, they argue as men: they address in human language their fellow-men. And yet nothing can be more decisive than the proofs of the supernatural guidance, elevation, and suggestion, under which the apostles wrote. Upon what plan, then, does the inspiring Spirit proceed? If the books are the infallible word of God, how is it that we see so much that seems to be of man in their form and manner? How came we to meet with, what has been so largely detailed in preceding lectures, the marks of authenticity and credibility which are so conspicuous in them? How shall we account for the internal evidences to which we are hereafter to proceed? What room could there be for ordinary learning and observation, in the composition of the sacred records? If every thing is divine, how is it that we see so much apparently human?

In order to settle these questions, so far as we are practically concerned in them, we must consult the sacred volume itself. Man's reasonings upon what God would be likely to do, are almost sure to be erroneous. Let us open the Bible, and observe the system which it unfolds. This was the method we pursued in considering the question of inspiration itself, and it led us on, step by step, to a conclusion perfectly clear and satisfactory. Let us do the same as to the plan and method on which the Holy Spirit proceeded with the sacred writers, and we shall soon arrive at an easy solution of all the difficulties which embarrass our minds.

Let us first trace out the **WONDERFUL METHOD** of the divine agency, in the inspiration of the scriptures; then the **EXTENT OF THIS INSPIRATION**; and lastly, the **ADVANTAGES** which we derive from both. A re-

flection or two on the importance of fully admitting and acting upon the doctrine thus illustrated, will close the subject; and leave us at liberty to review the whole argument deduced from the external evidences of Christianity.

**I. In order to trace out the WONDERFUL METHOD OF THE DIVINE AGENCY IN THE INSPIRATION OF THE SCRIPTURES, we must,**

1. Collect all the facts of the case, as they lie in the New Testament. We must compare what is decidedly the part of God, with what appears to be the part of man. The facts on the one hand, were established in the last lecture. The books are given by a plenary divine inspiration, as we have abundantly proved. They are the words of the Holy Ghost; they are the infallible standard of truth; no intermixture whatever of human frailty or mistake is to be found in the communication they make to us of Christianity. These are the facts on one side of the case—few, prominent, decisive. This is the part of God.

In order to collect the phenomena on the other side, let us open the New Testament again. We see, on the face of the whole, that the writers speak naturally, use the style, language, manner of address, familiar to them. There are peculiar casts of talent, expression, modes of reasoning in each author. The language is that of the country and age where they lived. They employ all their faculties, they search, examine, weigh, reason, as holy and sincere men, in such a cause, might be supposed to do. They use all their natural and acquired knowledge; their memory furnishes them with facts, or the documents and authentic records of the time are consulted by them for information. They plead with those to whom they are sent, they address the heart, they expostulate, they warn, they invite. The mind of man appears working every where. In the historical books,

the evangelists seem to follow their own trains of recollection. They relate incidents as they struck them, or were reported to them. In the devotional and epistolary books, again, natural talent, appropriate feelings and judgment, the peculiarities of the individual are manifest. Once more, St. Luke preserves his characteristic manner in the gospel and the Acts; St. Paul his own stile and method of reasoning; St. John may be known in his several productions. Lastly, the prophetic parts are more elevated; and yet breathe the spirit, and retain the peculiar phraseology of the writers. These are the phenomena on the other side. The facts are numerous, and might be multiplied with every fresh perusal of the sacred books.

The two classes constitute the opposite, and apparently contradictory facts of the case. The books are divine, and yet, to appearance, human. They are infallible, and yet evidently composed by mortals like ourselves. They are the word of God, and yet in the language of man.

2. By tracing, however, the inward structure of the books further, we perceive that the plan or method of the divine inspiration reconciles all these appearances, and subserves the most important practical purposes. We find that it unites the two classes of phenomena, the plenary influences of the Almighty Spirit, and the free and natural exertion of the characteristic faculties of the writers. Instead of addressing us immediately, God is pleased to use men as his instruments. Instead of speaking to us severally by an independent revelation, he has consigned his will to us at once in the holy scriptures. Instead of making known that will in the language of angels, or by the skill of poets and philosophers, he has been pleased to choose the unlettered apostles and evangelists. And, instead of using these as mere organic and passive instruments of his power, he has thought right to

leave them to the operations of their own minds, and the dictates of their own knowledge, habits, and feelings, so far as it could safely be done, as to the MANNER of communicating his will.

This plan reconciles every thing. The divine Spirit guarded the sacred penmen when they would otherwise have gone astray, superintended and watched over every step of their progress, suggested by direct discoveries what lay beyond the reach of their means of knowledge, and directed them to every topic, which to his infinite wisdom appeared necessary upon the whole, for the instruction of the church, and the conversion of mankind. Thus, on the one hand, the inspiration did not supersede, but supported, elevated, and directed them in the use of their natural faculties, of their stores of knowledge, of their experience and observation, and their efforts of recollection and reasoning. The human agency, on the other hand, did not weaken or defeat the supernatural communications; but conveyed them to men, moulded by the conceptions, and expressed in the words of common life. The facts of the case by no means imply that man mingled his frailties and errors with the revealed truths of Christianity; but, simply, that God was pleased to use man as his instrument. The human agency was subordinate to the divine. The Almighty Spirit moved and gently led on; the holy penmen followed the guidance. God inspired; man indited and wrote. The wisdom of the Creator sustained the weakness of the creature. The books therefore are divine, and yet in this sense human, without commixture or inconsistency—divine, as to the matter; human, as to the manner—divine, as to the supernatural tendency and direction; human, as to the stile employed—divine, as to the revelation; human, as to the instruments—the words of God as to the doctrine; the language of man as to the channel of conveyance.

The masterly decision of Warburton may, with one

important exception, be adopted, as well expressing the method of the divine conduct. I say with one important exception, for he strangely admits that some errors may have been allowed to fall from the pens of the sacred writers ; probably referring to matters not connected with the revelation. But the admission is quite inconsistent with the express doctrine of the sacred books on the subject of inspiration.

“The Holy Spirit,” says he, “so directed the pens of these writers, that no considerable error should fall from them, by enlightening them with his immediate influence in such matters as were necessary for the instruction of the church ; and which either through ignorance or prejudice they would otherwise have represented imperfectly, partially, or falsely ; and by preserving them by the more ordinary means of providence from any mistake of consequence, concerning those things whereof they had acquired a competent knowledge by the common way of information. In a word, by watching over them incessantly ; but with so suspended a hand as permitted the use, and left them to the guidance of their own faculties, while they kept clear of error ; and then only interposing, when, without this assistance, they would have been in danger of falling.”<sup>1</sup>

On the whole, all is clear, if we keep to the facts of the case—to what we have proved in our former lecture, and what we have traced out in this—and attribute such an inspiration to the minds of the sacred writers as exempted them from all error whatever in the communication of the divine will, and gave to every part of their declarations, its full sanction as the infallible word of God ; and, at the same time, allowed to each writer the free exercise of all his natural powers, and the delivery of the divine revelation according to his own habits and associations. This

. <sup>1</sup> Warburton's *Doctrine of Grace*, l. 1, c. vii.



accounts for and reconciles all the phenomena. The decisive claims of inspiration made by the apostles require the first; the obvious appearances of every part of the New Testament the second.<sup>2</sup>

3. Nor is the difficulty of explaining this method of the divine agency in the inspiration of the scriptures, any greater, than in other instances in the government of mankind; where the Almighty "worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will," and yet by means which do not interfere with the free agency, nor alter the moral characteristics, nor lessen the responsibility of man. Our concern is not to explain, but to receive the facts as they lie before us. It is only necessary to admit decisively that the highest measure of that inspiration which preserves from every mistake or error, was not inconsistent with the greatest freedom and latitude in the use of each writer's knowledge and talents, and ordinary means of information—an union incomprehensible, indeed, as to the particulars of it, to our limited faculties, but easy to that inscrutable wisdom which knows our frame, and can direct and elevate, without disturbing, the operations of our minds.

Having thus traced out in the structure of the sacred books, the mysterious method of the divine agency in inspiration, we may proceed in the same way to mark, so far as may be needful,

## II. THE EXTENT OF THE DIVINE INSPIRATION ACCORDING TO THE VARIETY OF MATTER WHICH THE BOOKS CONTAIN.

1. For by referring to the language of the apostles, as quoted in our last lecture, we shall find that the divine inspiration was extended to every part of the canonical writings, in the proportion in which each

<sup>2</sup> "In inspiring, the Divine Spirit evidently does not unmake the man; whence every sacred writer has his own peculiar character and style of composition."—J. Scott.

part stood related to the religion they communicate. Whatever weight the different parts of the sacred edifice were intended to sustain, a correspondent strength of inspiration was placed, as it were, at the foundation. Thus all is held immovably together. The triumphal arch of truth is, to us and in its results, equally firm in all its parts, whether we can trace out the relative strength of the materials or not.

Sometimes we read of divine messages by visions, dreams, angelic voices; at other times the Almighty appears to have revealed truth immediately to the minds of the apostles. Sometimes the sacred writers were rapt in the overpowering communications of the Spirit. At other times, and as the matter varied, their memory was fortified to recall the Saviour's life, doctrines, miracles, parables, discourses. In a different matter, an author accompanies St. Paul, and records what he saw and heard. Again, an Apostle hears of disorders in the churches, and is moved by the blessed Spirit to write to them, to denounce judgments, to prescribe a course of conduct. At other times, he enters upon a series of divine arguments; delivers in order the truths of the gospel; or expounds the figurative economy of Moses.

What the extent of the inspiration was in each case, we need not, indeed we cannot, determine. We infer from the uniform language of the New Testament, that in each case such assistance was afforded, as the exigencies of it required. The different measure, or kinds of inspirations, it is not for man to know, for man to say. Where the inspiration of suggestion, of direction, of elevation, of superintendence, was severally afforded, we cannot, and ought not to wish, to decide.

The prophetical parts, the doctrines of pure revelation, the historical facts beyond the reach of human knowledge, all the great outlines of Christianity, both as to doctrine and practice, were probably of the in-

spiration of suggestion, both as to the matter and the words (for we think in words). Where the usual means of information, or the efforts of memory were enough, as in much of the Gospels and Acts, the inspiration of direction may be supposed to have sufficed. Where the exposition of duty, or the rebuke of error, or exhortation to growth in grace, was the subject, the inspiration of elevation and strength may be considered as afforded. Where matters more incidental occur, the inspiration, still lessening with the necessity, was probably that of superintendency only, preserving from all improprieties which might diminish the effect of the whole, and providing for inferior, but not unimportant points of instruction. Even the slightest allusions to proverbial sayings, to the works of nature, to history, were probably not out of the range of the watchful guardianship of the Holy Spirit.

In all the parts, however, the operations of the mind and habits of the writers appear to act; but were exempted from error and mistake. In all the parts, the divine Spirit moved the writers to such subjects, and such a manner of treating them, as befitted the designs of infinite wisdom. All that is essential for us to know, is that such was the extent of the assistance in each case as sufficed to supply what was deficient in the writer, and to give to every part of his declarations their full sanction as the infallible word of God. Perhaps we cannot get nearer than this.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> By the inspiration of suggestion is meant such communications of the Holy Spirit, as suggested and dictated minutely every part of the truths delivered.

The inspiration of direction is meant of such assistance as left the writers to describe the matter revealed in their own way, directing only the mind in the exercise of its powers.

The inspiration of elevation added a greater strength and vigour to the efforts of the mind than the writer could otherwise have attained.

The inspiration of superintendency was that watchful care

2. And this seems to agree with the uniform conduct of the Divine Being, as it is represented in the scriptures. The Almighty never works a superfluous miracle; never supersedes human exertions and efforts, as a system of means, where the case admits of them; but rather comes in with such aid, and so attuned to the rational nature of man, as to guide him gently, but effectually; and qualify him for the duties and services to which he is called.

3. How far the inspiration of the scriptures extends to the most casual and remote allusions of an historical or philosophical kind, which affect in no way the doctrines or duties of religion, may now, perhaps, be determined. Let us appeal again to the books themselves. The Bible was not, indeed, given us to make us poets, or orators, or historians, or natural philosophers. Many things which such persons might think inaccurate, may therefore consist with a complete religious inspiration. Yet perhaps it is more consistent, on the whole, with all the scripture language, to say, that the inspiration of superintendence reached even to the least circumstances and most casual allusions of the sacred writers.

For there are two observations which may be made as to the most subordinate matters in the Holy Scriptures.

There is nothing in them which has been proved to be inconsistent with the facts and discoveries of history and philosophy. It is just as true that "the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy work," now, that so many thousand worlds are descried by means of the telescope, and such magnificent boundaries are assigned to creation; as when the Psalmist uttered them, however obscure or erroneous his views of astronomy may have

which preserved the writers from putting down any thing derogatory to the revelation with which it was connected.

been. Every thing stands true in the sense, and for the purposes for which it was intended. And in this the inspiration of the Bible shines forth. All other books are antiquated in a century or two, as to much of their contents. Some position or other is no longer tenable. Philosophy, in its advances, has directly overturned their statements. Not so the Bible. Such has been the superintending care of the blessed Spirit, that no one fact has ever been established against its allusions or observations.

The other circumstance is, that the slightest details and most apparently indifferent directions, have practical uses connected with them. Some division of the church, in some age, has derived benefit from them. The genealogies are clearly of this sort. The salutations also. Even the counsel given to Timothy "to drink no longer water, but take a little wine for his stomach's sake and often infirmities," has some relation to the friendship of the apostle for Timothy, to the sympathy of Christians, and the duty of preserving the health of young and laborious ministers. In like manner, the direction to "bring the cloak left at Troas and the books, but especially the parchments," has a connexion with that prudence in managing our affairs, and that mutual serviceableness, which are no inconsiderable branches of Christian charity; whilst they both show that the apostles wrought no miracles for their personal ease or convenience.

In short, the essential doctrines and revelations of Christianity are the citadel and nobler edifices and buildings of the vast city—the less important truths and duties are the various abodes which constitute the body of the place—we include within the walls all the smaller tenements—the truths of every kind affecting the religion—and even to the suburbs and outskirts, where we place the external and apparently indifferent matters, we extend the shadow of the

mighty circumvallation which encompasses and defends the whole.

Thus all the phenomena of the case are accounted for. Every fact concerning the plenary inspiration of the scriptures, which we had previously proved at so much length, is admitted. The facts as to the human language and style of the books are admitted also. The particular extent of inspiration in each case, as gathered, by way of inference, from the result produced, is, lastly, admitted. Thus all is light.

Let us then proceed to notice,

. III. THE STRIKING ADVANTAGES WHICH WE DERIVE FROM THE PLAN AND EXTENT OF THE DIVINE INSPIRATION as thus illustrated.

It is not for us, indeed, to presume to determine beforehand what it is befitting the Almighty God to do. But when his will is made known, we may and ought first to study in all humility what that will is, and then to mark the various benefits and advantages which flow to us from it. Thus with regard to the inspiration of the scriptures, other methods, so far as we can tell, might have had other advantages; the Almighty might have made known his truth in many different methods. But as he has been pleased to take the plan which we have been tracing out, we may be assured it is best for us upon the whole, and most conducive to God's gracious designs in redemption. Some of the advantages, then, which we may observe, are such as these.

1. By this condescension of God in his manner of inspiring the scriptures, truth is made more intelligible to the mass of mankind, than if the human faculties had been altogether extinguished, and the feelings of common life suspended or overborne. It is presented with more familiarity. It appears in a greater variety of lights. It receives the impression of each writer's mind, circumstances, cast of

character, habit of composition. All is native, simple, stamped with the human, and to us, more attractive, mould of our own minds. This method is manifestly best adapted for the great mass of mankind, speaks more directly to the heart, condescends more to human infirmity and the business of daily life. The manner of the instruction is not angelic and elevated beyond our sphere as men but a doctrine entering into our bosoms and concerns and feelings.

2. Again, the interpretation of scripture is rendered more easy, as well as more safe. It depends not on the turn of any unusual phrases, or the force of new words, but springs from the general import of language familiar to us all. The Bible is to be studied, its various parts compared, its metaphors illustrated, its poetical and historical allusions unfolded, all its declarations received, according to the well-known rules of human writing. The signification of peculiar terms is given by the writers themselves. An analogy and proportion of the faith pervades the whole volume. A surprising harmony connects all the parts. We have only simply to read the sacred records with a humble dependence on the Holy Spirit—without whose ordinary influences of illumination and grace, the matter revealed can never be duly understood—in order to be made wise unto salvation. The most unlearned Christian stands upon the same ground, as to all the commanding truths of revelation, with the greatest scholar; whilst the utmost diligence of the scholar will find employment in the adaptation of his acquisitions to the illustration of the more difficult parts of the inspired volume.

3. By this plan, further, the trifling inaccuracies which have insinuated themselves into the copies of the scriptures by the carelessness of transcribers, the various readings which have accumulated during eighteen centuries, and the further defects arising from translations, or from our ignorance of a few parti-

cular allusions, are of less moment. They do not impair the force of the divine books, because the truths are not conveyed in new and systematic language, but are clothed in ordinary terms, scattered over all the parts of the volume, repeated and inculcated in a thousand forms. The main doctrines and duties of Christianity cannot be misunderstood except by negligence or perverseness.

4. By the same divine wisdom in the plan of inspiration, the sacred books become capable of supplying those diversified proofs of authenticity and credibility which we detailed in our early lectures. They are the books of men like ourselves, as to the form and circumstances of them. They were written by our fellow-mortals. The simplicity of style, the artlessness of description, all the marks of veracity and integrity in the minute and circumstantial nature of the narrative, are accordingly found in them. They are susceptible of the same proof as to the authors by whom they were composed, and the credit due to all their statements, as other ancient writings. However low you stoop in examining the outward historical evidences of Christianity, you find them true to the very bottom. The divine inspiration leaves the native characters of human testimony fresh and unobscured.

5. In like manner, all the internal evidences of the truth of Christianity to which we shall next proceed, are by this method of inspiration preserved. Whatever in the doctrines, the precepts, the character of Christ, the tendency of the revelation, its suitableness to the state and wants of man, may be found in illustration of a divine religion, are capable of being traced with the same certainty, as if the works were merely human; instead of being, as they are, only human as to their form and method, but completely inspired as to their matter and infallible communications.

6. Once more, the scriptures are thus better adapted to be a moral probation of the heart and disposition



of the readers, as we have frequently observed. Truth, as now inspired, is obvious and easy to the humble, but hidden from the proud. Its discoveries, mixed and interwoven with the history and feelings and habits and circumstances of men, are a touchstone of sincerity; and are only to be apprehended by those who study the scriptures in the same temper in which they were written. Examples of every kind are exhibited according as the wisdom of God saw fit. "Every sentence is indeed the sure testimony of God, but it is only so in that sense in which it is proposed as truth. Facts occurred and words were spoken, as to the import of them and the instruction contained in them, exactly as they stand recorded. But the morality of words and actions, merely recorded as spoken and done, must be judged of by the doctrinal and preceptive parts of the same book."<sup>s</sup> The Bible, therefore, is all light to the simple and devout; but darkness in parts to the corrupt and worldly-minded. The falls and errors of the true servants of God, the courses and manners of the wicked, the corruptions and disorders of the church, are recorded for "doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." The New Testament is human throughout, describes man as he is, exhibits the defects as well as the graces of the saints; whilst, at the same time, it is divine as to its authority, truth, and infallible inspiration.

A practical reflection or two on the importance of fully admitting and acting upon the doctrine of inspiration thus illustrated, may now be offered.

I. IT IS ESSENTIAL TO THE RIGHT RECEPTION OF CHRISTIANITY. The very first point in Christianity is to entertain a deep practical persuasion of the infallible truth of the whole of the scriptures; to

<sup>s</sup> Scott's preface.

receive them in all their parts as the word of God ; and not to consider the most trivial allusions in the sacred volume to be so alienated from the divine superintendency, as to leave an opening to men to assume to themselves the office of separating what they term the uninspired, from the inspired parts of scripture. The statements we have made as to the human manner in which the Bible is written, are not, therefore, to be abused. The moment men begin to apply these statements to the matter revealed, they commit the most fatal error. The matter is not human. He who dares to consider any part of scripture as of man, sets up his own prejudices as the rule of judgment ; believes only what he likes ; and commonly ends in undervaluing or rejecting some of the fundamental truths of the gospel. " A partial inspiration is to all intents and purposes no revelation at all. Mankind would be as much embarrassed to know what was inspired and what not, as they would be to collect a religion for themselves."<sup>6</sup> A pious and cordial belief of the full and entire inspiration of the Bible is of the highest moment.

I allow indeed still, as I did in the commencement of the last lecture, that if the scriptures had been left by Almighty God to be written by men, merely to the best of their ability, and were to be considered only as the authentic and credible writings of their respective authors, they would bind the conscience and direct to salvation. But I maintain also, after what has been proved, that to stop there is not enough. We are now called on by every obligation which can touch a responsible creature, to admit the positive and irrefragable evidence of the inspiration of the sacred books. The corruption of our nature is not to be left to mere human inculcations of revealed religion, when God has affixed his broad seal of infallible inspiration

<sup>6</sup> Seed.

to the records of it. This is a point of vital importance to the very existence of any practical fruits of Christianity. "Without it, the star which is to direct our course is clouded; our compass is broken to pieces, and we are left to make the voyage of life in sad uncertainty, amidst a thousand rocks, shelves, and quicksands."<sup>7</sup>

II. Need I say that the view we have taken of the subject is not only indispensable to a right reception of Christianity, but tends also to CLOSE THE AVENUES TO SOME OF THE MOST PERNICIOUS EVILS WHICH HAVE desolated the church.

A neglect of the unerring truth of the Bible in all the matters, however minute, of the revelation contained in it, has been a source of one class of corruptions: a forgetfulness of the natural and characteristic manner in which the sacred writers use the language and express themselves according to the habits of the particular age and country where they lived, has been the occasion of others.

i. The first is, of course, the most formidable evil, because it saps the foundation of the whole of Christianity. From the want of a cordial submission to the inspiration of the scriptures, have sprung the usurpations over conscience; the authority of tradition in the interpretation of scripture; the claim of infallibility in a visible head of the church; the prohibition of the free use of the Bible to the laity; the exclusive imposition of a particular translation;<sup>8</sup> and the intermixture of apocryphal with canonical writings. The plenary and authoritative inspiration of the New Testament would have taught the church of Rome, that the only infallible standard of truth was the word of God; that that word was able and sufficient to make us wise unto salvation; and that it was to be

<sup>7</sup> Doddridge.

<sup>8</sup> The Vulgate Latin.

interpreted according to the ordinary rules of human language, and not by the inconsistent and erroneous dictates of the fathers—in short, that the aids of learning, and the wisdom of antiquity, and all the accumulated illustrations of former and later commentators were to be brought to the scriptures as the standard—and not the scriptures to them.

Again, licentious interpretations generally, would be checked by a recurrence to the infallible inspiration of the scriptures. What are all the monstrous expositions of the German infidel school? What all their daring and absurd attempts to explain away every mystery; to evade the force of the most fundamental doctrines; to reduce the claims of every divine miracle; to bring down revelation to a mere narrative of ordinary history, and a barren code of natural religion; but the result of an impious disparagement of the divinely-inspired books of the Holy Ghost?

And where is it that the Socinians of our own country have begun their work of demolition, in sweeping away all the peculiar mysteries of the gospel—the fall—redemption—the deity of our Lord—the atonement—the personality and grace of the Holy Spirit? Is it not by denying or lowering the inspiration of the scriptures? Is it not by opposing their own reasonings and opinions to the decisions of the apostles? Is it not by acting as if the sacred penmen had argued inconclusively?

Whence, again, are we to trace all the hazardous darings of conjectural criticism, and the resistance to the fair import and bearing of those parts of truth which most abase the pride and contradict the passions of man, so prevalent even amongst divines who admit the divine authority of the scriptures, and the great features of revelation? What is it that allows men to enervate all the force of truth by miserable evasions and diluted paraphrases?<sup>9</sup> How is it that they

<sup>9</sup> Schleusner abounds with such faults.

impose on the scriptures, rules of interpretations which they would never tolerate for a moment in any profane author? How is it we hear of one part of scripture being magnified at the expense of another?—The gospels and the sermon on the mount, for instance, set up against the epistles?—St. James opposed to St. Paul?—The words of our Lord, to the writings of his apostles?—The New Testament to the Old? Whence is all this, but from a secret unbelief; a secret irreverence; a secret reliance on human reasoning; a tacit neglect of the revelation of God as committed to writing by the immediate guidance of the Holy Ghost?

ii. On the other hand, the class of errors, not generally so fatal, but yet most injurious, which spring from a forgetfulness of the human character and form of the stile of the scriptures, is to be guarded against. If the inspiration of scripture be so interpreted as to supersede the free and natural flow of the writer's mind; if sound and reasonable means of expounding the force of terms, the import of metaphors, the signification of allusions to local customs be discarded—if the book is considered as so divine in its form, as well as its matter, as to exclude the human character of the manner of writing, the errors which may arise are by no means inconsiderable. Truth is conveyed off, as it were, into the lifeless reservoirs of human contrivance, instead of flowing fresh from the living sources of the divine mind. Harsh and unnatural interpretations are imposed; arguments are violated, or misstated; figures and parables are pushed into minute and far-fetched novelties. Systems of theology are framed according to the taste and habits of the student, and not after the native simplicity of the divine word. A few passages are taken out of their connexion, and forced to an unnatural sense, and then the scriptures compelled to bend to that exposition. The various statements and arguments of the Holy

Scriptures, instead of being diligently examined and compared, as so many phenomena, from which inferences are to be drawn with the care of the inductive philosophy—are hastily put together, reduced to a few rigid and unbending propositions, and are made the first principles of all subsequent advances. By these means the doctrine of the inspiration is overstrained and misapplied. The human method of writing is forgotten. Men pass over and obliterate all the finer traits, all the hidden and gentle whispers of truth, all the less obvious, and yet natural and affecting impressions of character; all what Lord Bacon calls the “first flowings of the scriptures.” “We want,” says that great author, “short, sound, and judicious notes and observations on scripture, without running into common-places, pursuing controversies, or reducing those notes to artificial method; but leaving them quite loose and native. For certainly, as those wines which flow from the first treading of the grape, are sweeter and better than those forced out by the press, which gives them the roughness of the husk and the stone, so are those doctrines best and sweetest which flow from a gentle crush of the scriptures, and are not wrung into controversies and common-places.”

III. Such a pliant yielding to the natural impression of the language of scripture, connected with the firmest faith in all the parts of it, as infallibly inspired, is the main lesson to be derived from the doctrine we have been considering. Indeed, THE SPONTANEOUS DICTATE OF THE HUMBLE AND TEACHABLE MIND, when it once understands these illustrations of the plan on which the divine inspiration proceeds, is to submit at once to the divine wisdom. The first dictate of a penitent's heart, when he receives a revelation from God, is to bow implicitly to the discovery, both as to the matter and the method of it. The same temper of docility, on which we have all

along insisted, will at once conduct him through the labyrinth which human pride and unbelief have contrived to throw around the doctrine of inspiration. Neither of the classes of error to which I have adverted, will occur to him. The whole question will be settled the moment he apprehends the nature of the case. If God has given a revelation of his will, and has consigned all the parts of that revelation to books, by the hands of apostles endowed with miraculous qualifications, those books are the infallible word of God himself. They can contain no mixture whatever of mistake or error. If God has further been pleased to permit the sacred writers to exercise their own faculties; to employ all their natural and acquired knowledge; and to leave throughout an impression of human feeling in their way of delivering this revelation, then their books are to be interpreted and understood according to the ordinary rules of common life—that awe only being preserved and that caution used in the application of those rules, which the solemnity of the occasion requires. Thus truth meets the mind, entire and simple in its own harmony and force. The human form of the writing lessens not the divine impress of the inspiration. Every part of the Bible is the unerring standard of religion. The main gift of God to man is this infallibly inspired rule. Its entire strength and inconceivable dignity remain. The whole scripture is divine. It resembles not the mystic image seen by the Babylonish monarch, the feet of which were partly of iron and partly of miry clay; and which, smitten at length, fell prostrate and helpless: but it stands erect and secure. Its materials are all of heavenly origin; it rests in every part on the immediate support and power of God; and defies the violent assaults, and more secret aggressions of its foes.

But we have lingered too long on this particular

question. It has drawn us off insensibly from the grandeur of the Christian evidences. It ought never to have been raised. Inspiration is involved in every part of the argument we have already considered, and will appear yet more distinctly in those branches of the internal evidences, to which we shall soon call your attention. But the question having been once agitated, it required to be thoroughly examined. It is the grand means of evasion in a literary period like the present. Men will allow every thing except the inspiration; because, from every thing else they can escape, and frame a Christianity to their own taste. Inspiration—a full, unerring inspiration of every part of scripture, brings an obligation which no sophistry can elude; it leaves every part of truth in all its mighty energy; it makes its demands direct upon the conscience: whilst the human mould into which its language is cast, augments the guilt of unbelief and disobedience, because it renders the misunderstanding of the revelation impossible, except where the mind is dishonest to itself.

Let us now rapidly REVIEW THE COURSE OVER WHICH WE HAVE PASSED IN THE PRESENT DIVISION OF OUR LECTURES, AND CONCLUDE THE CONSIDERATION OF THE EXTERNAL EVIDENCES of the Christian faith.

It will be recollected, that our design has been to enable the Christian, and especially the young Christian, “to give an answer to every man that asketh him a reason of the hope that is in him, with meekness and fear.” With this view, we have endeavoured to combine the historical with the internal evidences, to give him such information as to the external proofs of Christianity, as may prepare him for those which spring from the intrinsic excellency of the gospel, and its holy effects on his heart and life. We have accordingly, not treated the argument abstractedly and



formally, but as a matter of immediate interest and feeling. We have appealed continually to the conscience, and have enforced each topic with such practical addresses, as might, by God's blessing, imprint it on the inmost soul. We took up the argument on the admissions of natural religion; and have traced out, step by step, the evidences of the truth and importance of the Christian revelation, as they would be presented to the mind of a candid and sincere inquirer. We have not confined ourselves to a simple proof of each point, but have aimed at exhibiting the accumulated force of the respective testimonies, so as to augment and deepen the impression of the unutterable value of the Christian religion, and the immense obligation under which every one lies, to receive and obey it.

In the present series, we have gone through the proofs of the authenticity, credibility, divine authority, and complete inspiration of the sacred books; reserving the consideration of the internal evidence for the next volume.

Previously to our entering upon these topics, we considered THE TEMPER OF MIND in which the question should be studied; and showed that some measure of docility and willingness to examine the question with fairness; some measure of earnestness in the pursuit; of prayer to God; and of a practical obedience to truth, so far as it was known, were essentially necessary, and might be most reasonably required. It appeared, however, that in infidels, whether we looked at the literary, the careless, or the low and uneducated classes, this temper was so entirely wanting, that their impiety, mockery of all religion, debasing principles of morals, and general self-conceit and immorality, sufficiently proved the badness of their cause.<sup>10</sup>

The NECESSITIES of mankind next engaged our attention, and we found that the Heathen nations, before the coming of Christ, were plunged in a most fearful gulf of ignorance, idolatry, vice and misery, with nothing to recall them to the knowledge of the true religion—“without hope, and without God in the world.” We saw, moreover, that the superior light of Deists in Christian countries, was borrowed from the very Christianity which they rejected—that the Pagan nations now are in precisely the same state of misery and darkness, as those before the coming of Christ; and that the condition of Christian countries, in proportion as the Christian religion is inadequately known and obeyed, confirms every other argument in favour of the indispensable necessity of a revelation from God, if man was ever to be raised from a state of hopeless degradation, blindness, and woe.<sup>11</sup>

These points, preliminary as they are, were sufficient to settle the whole question with a sincere mind. The necessities of man addressed such a cry of misery to the Father of mercies; and the want of all religious feeling in the opponents of revelation, so betrayed the wretched motives of unbelief, that any one taking up the Bible, and seeing the adequate and complete remedy which it proposes for human guilt, might be convinced of its divine original; and would be led, from the very temper of piety and teachableness which we have supposed him to possess, to acquiesce at once in a revelation which meets all the wants of a ruined world.

But we proceeded, in the next place, to consider the arguments for the AUTHENTICITY of the books of the New Testament; and we first illustrated the manner in which ancient books are proved every day, to be the real and undoubted productions of their professed authors, namely, by testimony traced up from age to age, and recorded in undoubted memorials and

<sup>11</sup> Lect. III.

public writings, till we arrive at the book sought. And we showed, that it was morally impossible that the New Testament should have been falsified, considering the notoriety of the facts, and the early diffusion of the books ; and we proved that its authenticity rests on precisely similar evidences, though infinitely stronger, than men are uniformly governed by in all like cases.

From these general remarks, we proceeded to show that the direct testimony to our books may be distinctly traced up from the present age to the apostolic ; that the canon of scripture was cautiously settled ; that the utmost integrity is apparent in all the testimonies of the Christian church ; that Heathen and Jewish adversaries admitted our books ; that manuscripts now extant are of a date reaching back to the very time when Jerome had the autographs, or the transcripts of them, in his hands.<sup>12</sup>

We next proceeded to inquire into the CREDIBILITY, or full and entire trustworthiness of all the matters recorded in these authentic books. And here we stated, that in the same way as other histories are proved to be worthy of credit, so were our sacred books—we showed that the proofs of authenticity included, in this case, the proofs of the facts contained in the writings—that the contemporary heathen historians record all the main facts on which Christianity rests—that the Jewish historian Josephus, though an enemy to the Christian faith, confirms in a thousand instances, the gospel narrative—that Mahomet himself admitted its truth—and that the internal character and style of the writings, the evident simplicity and circumstantiality of the history, the number of the witnesses, their holy lives, the pure doctrine they taught, and the sufferings they endured, even unto death, in attestation of facts of which they were com-

<sup>12</sup> Lect. IV. and V.

petent witnesses, and which passed under their own observation, made it impossible that they should deceive us.

And this authentic and credible character of the New Testament, was not merely established, but established by an accumulation of testimony which almost oppressed the mind. Every kind of proof of which the case was susceptible, poured in upon us. The evidence was shown to be augmenting continually in every age, by the labours of learned men, the investigation of medals, the recovery of manuscripts, and the illustration of ancient facts in history. In fact, no ancient books have a hundredth part of the evidence which surrounds and encircles the holy scriptures. Men are acting every hour in their most important temporal concerns, with infinitely less reason, than the case of Christianity demands. The reliance placed on the credit of witnesses in our courts of judicature, is folly, compared with the rational confidence inspired by the testimony of Moses and the prophets, of Christ and the apostles. We showed, in short, that the evidences for the authenticity and credibility of the New Testament are unparalleled—that the world never saw any thing resembling it. No religion was ever recorded in sacred books, by the first founders of it, and submitted at the time to the inspection and investigation of mankind, but the Christian. And against all this evidence, nothing can be alleged. There is no counter-statement, there is no other account of the rise of Christianity. The New Testament stands without a competitor.<sup>13</sup>

And yet all this overpowering evidence is only the beginning of a series of proofs.

We came, next, to consider the magnificent apparatus which surrounded the **DIVINE AUTHORITY** of the religion contained in these authentic and credible books:

<sup>13</sup> Lect. VI.

And here we, first, contemplated with admiration the **MIRACLES** of our Lord and his apostles. And having proved that the facts involved in each miracle, viewed abstractedly from their cause, were undeniably established by the testimonies which supported the credibility of the narrative generally; we considered the number and variety of our Lord's mighty works, the palpable and clear suspension of the laws of nature which they exhibited, the circumstances of publicity under which they were performed, the abiding effects of them, the prophetic oracles of the former Testament which were accomplished by them, and the national usages and monuments which were, in consequence, set up at the time, and which subsist to the present day. Such miracles, supported by such evidence—a whole nation witnesses to them—a new and holy religion set up from the first on the footing of them—interwoven indissolubly with the religion, in attestation of which those who wrought them lived and suffered and died—such miracles the world has never seen, except in the previous dispensation of the same revelation by Moses. The unsophisticated conclusion of the human mind, on perusing the records of them, is, that the Christian religion is of God.<sup>14</sup>

And what shall we then say of the prodigious scheme of **PROPHECY** fulfilled in every past age, and fulfilling now before our eyes? What shall we say of a scheme, which, beginning with the fall of man, accompanied the Jewish church in each period, and stretches on to the consummation of all things—which centered all its predictions in one divine person, the Son of God—which exhibited all the wisdom of the Almighty in the arrangement of its several parts and its growing accomplishments—which bore the stamp of a holy God in the pure and devoted piety of the prophets themselves—and which subserved the most

important ends of religious instruction and consolation? But why do I remind you of the prophecies in their scheme and plan, when I see the accomplishment of them surrounding me with wonder—when the person of the Messiah unites a thousand most extraordinary indications of prescience—when Jerusalem trodden down by the Gentles, and the Jews dispersed before our eyes, are a standing miracle—when the desolations of Nineveh and Tyre and Babylon remain to the present day—when the Arabs and Egyptians are witnesses of the prophetic inspiration—when the sketch of the division of empires in the wonderful predictions of Noah, and the mystic image of Nebuchadnezzar, is being filled up in every age—when the great apostacy of the western church strikes the heart with dismay in one view, and yet relieves it in another from the oppression, which such corruptions, if not marked out in the word of prophecy, would have produced? And whither do not the unaccomplished parts of the great scheme lead the labouring faith of the Christian?<sup>15</sup>

But, my brethren, I check myself. When was there such a combination of moral proof for the truth of any one subject, as conspires to illustrate the Christian evidences? All the wisdom and power and goodness and sovereignty of the Almighty are displayed before our obedient faith. It is not merely a stream of evidence; it is a swelling tide—a flood which bears along the vessel, and against which not a gust or breath of objection can be raised. It stands alone. It bears the unequivocal impress of the majesty of the one revelation which the blessed God has vouchsafed to man.

And why should I add a word on the PROPAGATION of Christianity, and its BENEFICIAL EFFECTS, except to say, that they constitute of themselves independent

<sup>15</sup> Lect. VIII. and IX.

proofs which nothing can invalidate ; and that, when connected with the preceding, they complete and conclude the external evidences of Christianity ? <sup>16</sup>

Nothing can be added. So far as we can judge, the case admits of no stronger evidence. All the attributes of the Almighty, refulgent in the MIRACULOUS powers—diffused all around in the word of PROPHECY, as reflected in the events of the world for six thousand years—concentrated in the PROPAGATION of the gospel ; and blessing mankind daily in its BENEFICIAL EFFECTS, emblazon the Christian revelation with a glory which bursts upon every eye, and penetrates every heart which is not wilfully closed and hardened by perverseness and obduracy.

And the whole evidence is sealed by the doctrine of the DIVINE INSPIRATION of the scriptures, which, though employing a human channel, renders every thing infallible as to the matter of the revelation which it conveys ; and thus unites the highest emanations of the wisdom and power of God with the most compassionate exercises of his condescension and grace.<sup>17</sup>

And yet the whole of these evidences form but one division of the great subject. Those arising from its suitableness to the state and wants of man, and the intrinsic excellency of the revelation itself, are yet to be considered, and will constitute a body of proof, as complete in its kind, and as powerful in its demands upon our faith, as that which we have been now reviewing. But we conclude,

1. It is surely not too much to say, that on any subject of worldly prudence, such a mass of evidence would be considered as rising to a moral demonstration which no reasonable man could resist—it would be considered as an act, not so much of faith, as of COMMON SENSE, to follow such proofs—the man who refused so to do, would be condemned by all the rules

<sup>16</sup> Lect. X. and XI.

<sup>17</sup> Lect. XII. and XIII.

of conduct which he is compelled to follow every day of his life. We might more reasonably question the existence of Julius Cæsar, Alfred, or Charlemagne—or the authenticity and credibility of the histories of Thucydides, or Bede, or Davila, or Clarendon—or all the facts and histories in the world, than we could deny the facts and miracles and truth of the Christian religion. We must reject the evidences of our senses, we must spurn the testimony of all past history, we must throw into confusion the elements of all knowledge, we must dig up the foundations of civilization and law and science and jurisprudence, we must extinguish conscience and put off our whole intellectual and moral nature, before we can consistently reject the evidences of Christianity.

I rely not on one or two minute points. I press not the accuracy or force of all the particular facts and arguments I have adduced. I proceed on the broad and commanding features of a divine religion, which present themselves on whichever side we view it. It is not one thing only, but every thing, that converges and concentrates its light on the Christian doctrine.

And yet such is the obvious excellency of that doctrine in itself, that it requires but little external proof. Any one of the points we have been reviewing, is enough, and more than enough, to form the credentials of a religion, bearing on its very surface all the impress of the holy and gracious Creator and Preserver of mankind. It wants, so to speak, no historical evidence; and yet it possesses every species of it in the highest degree. Its purity challenges of itself the reverence and obedience of mankind; and yet it comes surrounded with all the splendour and attraction of miraculous powers and predictive inspiration.

2. Whence is it, then, that men are so backward to receive this divine guest? Whence is it that with no one solid reason to be advanced against it, objections and difficulties are continually urged? Whence



is it that men who act on infinitely less evidence every day of their lives, refuse to act upon the evidence of the Christian revelation? Whence is it that the cause of infidelity, unsustained by argument, survives and is propagated?<sup>18</sup>

The answer to these inquiries is, the simple fact, that when the rules of ordinary judgment are applied to Christianity, we have TO OVERCOME THE RELUCTANCE OF THE HUMAN HEART. The reception of Christianity is a joint act of the understanding and the will. Men assent readily enough to the slightest external proofs, when a thing meets their inclinations, and falls in with their taste and habits. Men assent readily enough to the highest and most incomprehensible doctrines of mathematical science, and venture every thing upon the truth of the practical consequences of them, because these things touch not their passions and vices and moral inclinations. But in religion the same men start aside, reason inconclusively, act the most absurd part, deny their own convictions, and violate all the dictates of prudence and truth. The fall of man, and the disorder of all his powers is such, that he is credulous to excess, can believe without proof, and follow without inquiry, when his affections lead the way; whilst no force of evidence can win his heart, if he dislike the inferences to which he knows his assent must conduct him.

3. It is to lead you to break through this unreasonable opposition of the passions; it is to determine you by the grace of God (without which we can do nothing aright) to yield to the force of conscience, and the claims of true reason early in life, before vice

<sup>18</sup> Not one of the chief works on the Evidences of Christianity was ever answered. Who has answered Lardner—Michaelis—Paley—Porteus—T. H. Horne?—Or even the brief and select arguments of Lyttleton and Leslie?—Whereas Gibbon's elaborate objections against Christianity received thirty or forty satisfactory replies at once!

has hardened your hearts, and converse with the wicked has emboldened you to resist evidence—that we have addressed this course of lectures to you.

To the candid and sincere mind all is light in the Christian doctrine: to the heart pre-occupied with vice and irreligion, all is darkness. Christianity is a probation of the state and feelings of all to whom it is addressed. If it be examined with any thing of simplicity, its evidences shine forth brightly upon the view, they convince the understanding, they awaken the force of conscience, they bow the will; and the inquirer prostrates himself at the footstool of the divine majesty when revealing his grace to his dependent and sinful creatures. The whole soul receives an impression of the glory and wisdom and foreknowledge and power and mercy of God. The discoveries of revelation fall in with the wants and miseries and forebodings of every heart. The remedy proposed suits precisely the fears of the guilty mind, and the apprehensions which natural religion, illuminated by the Christian revelation shining around it, injects at times into the stoutest breast.

Especially, young persons who have been educated in the Christian doctrine and have observed its holy effects in those who obey it, cannot but be sensible of the claims which religion has upon their faith and obedience. Most of those whom I address are in these circumstances. They know that the holy religion of the gospel is true. They know that when they fear God, and live in prayer, and are willing to be obedient to his will, all the Bible seems easy to them. Objections are then without force. The direct proofs of a divine origin shine forth from every doctrine and precept, like the sun in the firmament.

It is to confirm you in these good impressions; it is to set before you the incomparable strength of the Christian evidences; it is to shield you against the darts of the spiritual adversary; it is to lead you on

to that fixed love and obedience to your Saviour which no temptations can materially disturb, that we now address you. Yield, then, amiable and youthful hearers, just entering upon life, to the full force of your Christian calling. Follow the impulse of conscience; listen to the "still small voice" of mercy in the gospel. Whether you can enter fully into the historical evidences of the Christian religion or not, is of less moment. There are proofs of Christianity level to the unlearned and ordinary inquirer, as well as to the literary and scientific. You can understand, at least, that the external evidences are far stronger than men deem satisfactory every day in the concerns of life. You can understand that the agreement of all pious and learned men in opinion, as to the force and validity of these evidences, is as good a ground for you to act upon, as you are compelled to be satisfied with as to the practical results of scientific and abstruse investigations. The vast body of mankind are always acting on the judgment of others, in matters of which they cannot fully judge for themselves. These are reasonable grounds enough for you, as to the historical evidences. And when these are joined to a conviction of the intrinsic excellency of the Christian religion, and a perception in some measure of its holy effects, they place you on an impregnable bulwark which no sophistry of the wicked can assail. You have found the pearl of unknown price. You have found the infallible remedy for all your moral diseases. You have reached the port and haven of peace. You have escaped from the pit and cave of vice and darkness, into the noon-day of illumination and truth.

4. Act, then, fully on the revelation you profess. Secure all these advantages by a more entire submission of heart to God. Remember that the Christian evidences can only bring you to the doors of the sacred temple. To enter that temple must be the fruit of grace. It is not the proof of authenticity or

credibility that can change the heart. It is not the magnificence of miracles that can infuse the love of God. It is not the wonderful accomplishment of prophecies that can subdue our sins. It is not the propagation or beneficial effects of the gospel that can produce holiness in our lives. It is not the conviction of the inward excellency of the Christian doctrines, that can engage our obedience to God. It is not the persuasion of the force and obligation of all the combined proofs of our holy faith; that can generate a correspondent frame of heart.

All these proofs are only as an introduction to a further end. It is the grace of God's Holy Spirit, sought for by earnest prayer, that alone can renew the will, sway the affections, and purify the heart of fallen man. It is the power of that Saviour whose gospel you receive, that alone can strengthen you against temptation, and form you to holy love. And this is the end to which we would lead you. You were born in a Christian land, you have been brought up in the Christian religion, you have partaken of the Christian sacraments, you have, many of you, ratified your vows in the face of the church. Put then your Christianity into practice. If you listen to the seductions of vice, I warn you of the consequences. If you lend an ear to its sorceries, your senses will be bewildered, your understanding clouded, your heart hardened. The evidences of Christianity will fade and escape from your view. You will remain a mere speculative believer, if you sink not into open unbelief. But if you boldly follow conscience; if you avoid the company and practices of the wicked; if you strive against indifference and prejudices and worldliness of mind; if you implore the grace of God by fervent prayer; if you act on what you know, you will be secure and happy.

Rise, then to the true dignity of this duty. Repulse the suggestions of a depraved heart. Adhere to the great revelation of mercy in the gospel. Behold

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your heavenly father reconciled. Behold all his love exhausted in the amazing gift of his own Son dying as a sacrifice for your sins. See around the person of the Son of God all the truths of revelation concentrated. Behold every part of the divine doctrine casting its glory on the face of Jesus Christ. Let the authentic and credible records of your faith lead you up to the feet of this Saviour incarnate for your sake, performing his mighty works, promulgating his healing doctrine, fulfilling all the ancient prophecies concerning himself, delivering new and most august predictions, promising his Holy Spirit to his disciples, and ascending up to heaven to carry forward all the designs of redemption, to accomplish all the other prophecies of the divine word, and to close the whole dispensation of his mercy at the final tribunal of his judgment.

Choose the good part. Take the side of truth, and holiness, and wisdom. Yield not to the wretched dictates of a proud, or the base appetites of a sensual heart. You are made for eternity. You are capable of the knowledge and love of God. The grace of God will not be denied to fervent prayer. That grace can rectify, elevate, purify, save you. That grace can make your youth chaste and devout, and your age pure and honourable. Thus will you answer all the anxious efforts and labours of your parents, your ministers, your friends. Thus will you experience the true and elevated ends of Christianity in its peace and tranquillity of conscience, in its gift of the forgiveness of sins, in its consolations under sorrow and affliction, in its sustaining power at the moment of death. Death will be disarmed of its terrors. Eternity will only begin your happiness. Your feelings and wishes will be in conformity with the inevitable course of things. Futurity—the dread of the wicked—at which the sceptic turns pale—on the verge of which even the hardened unbeliever begins to doubt,—will

be to you the day of triumph, the moment of victory, the instant of final and never-ending blessedness. For then will that Saviour, whose REVELATION you have received and obeyed upon earth, and whose GRACE has governed your heart and guided your life, receive you to himself, make you share his crown, adorn you with his glory, clothe you with his immortality, and admit you into the palace of his majesty, "to sit down with him on his throne," and to live and reign with him and his holy angels, for ever and ever.

END OF VOL. I.

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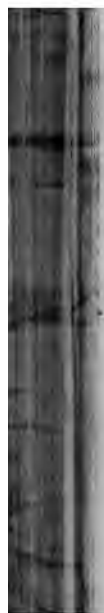
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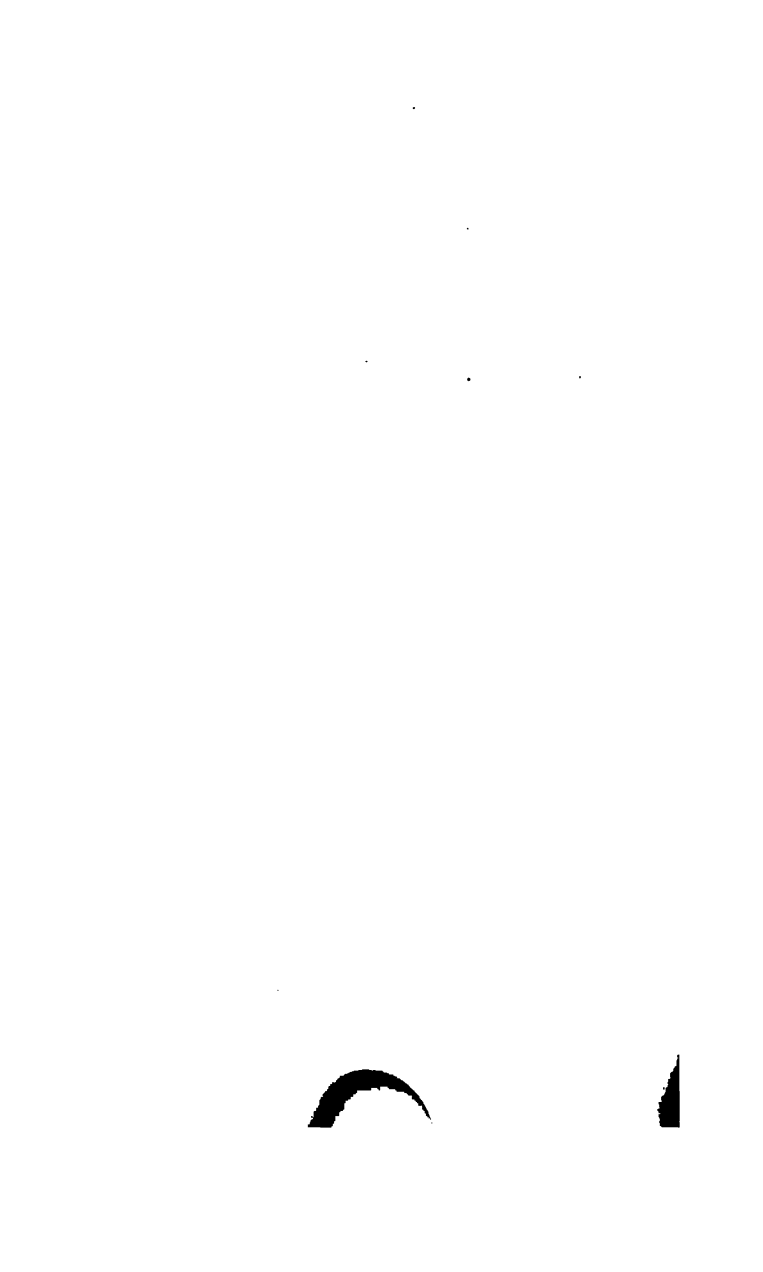
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